UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE EXPERIENCE OF HOPE
IN THE LIVES OF MIDLIFE WOMEN RETURNING TO SCHOOL

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND

RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1997

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DEGREE: MASTER OF EDUCATION

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 1997

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To my mother, Gwen Sutherland, the woman who models hope in my life.

Abstract

This study describes the experience of hope in the lives of midlife reentry women. It employs a qualitative case study research design to explore hope in six midlife women who have returned to school. Analysis was carried out using individual case and cross-case analysis. Common themes from the inquiry indicated hope for participants was experienced as relating in the world, connecting with spirituality, acquiring new skills, finding sense in emotional chaos, and making a choice. On a broader level, hope was described as an interactive, overlapping process comprised of the following five dynamics: affiliative, transcendent, cognitive, affective, and behavioral. A "Model of Hope" was developed as a further understanding of the experience of hope in midlife reentry women.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my appreciation to the following persons who contributed to the successful completion of this research study:

Dr. Ronna Jevne, my supervisor, who inspired me to "go where the energy is" and somehow knew the right words of encouragement for me.

Dr. Sue Scott, Dr. Carolyn Yewchuk, and Dr. Fran Hare, my committee members, for their support and interest in the project.

Wendy Eddy for co-facilitating the Workshop. Her invaluable input and encouragement sustained my hope at an important time in the process of this study.

The participants in the study who shared honestly and openly about their experiences of hope. It was their courage and commitment to explore their own sense of hope that gave this study the color and depth it has. To Bev Sohnle, a special thank you for showing special interest.

To God, who connects me with spirituality, listens to my reflections, and who heard my aspirations and answered my prayers.

Also, I am especially grateful to my children and their spouses for the hope they continually instill within me. The quality people they are, their enthusiasms, and the support they have extended to me as a midlife reentry woman increasingly serves to enhance my hope.

And finally, very importantly, to my husband, who has encouraged me to follow my dreams, who has supported me in my struggles, and to whom I now say, "Let's get on with our life!"

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> Whether it's just going for a walk or whether it's just going to Safeway and picking up a bouquet of flowers and putting them on my kitchen counter and [pause] having them in front of me as I work around the house or whatever I'm doing; just to be able to see the brightness, the beauty, the intricacies, the delicateness [pause] it just gives me a tremendous sense of hope for my own life, for the future, and [pause] it also grounds me once again in my faith in God.
>
> Individual Interview
> Suzanne

This is a personal reflection of the things in Suzanne's life which enhance her sense of hope and it is one of the indications of how she brings hope into her life. Suzanne is a middle aged woman who has returned to school after several years of absence. She has done a good deal of volunteer work throughout her life and almost all her children have left home. She has aspirations of her reentry experience concluding in a new career, greater economic freedom, and added purpose in her life. From the outside looking in, her hopes appear great! Further reflection, however, causes me to wonder more profoundly on the concept of hope, and inevitably, I find myself speculating as to what hope is about for Suzanne and what part hope might play in her life at this time. I wonder where hope has been in her life previously and what elements help build her sense of hope. Is she ever without hope? For Suzanne and other midlife women returning to school, I contemplate their hopefulness and wonder how I might understand

this phenomenon in a way that would be meaningful for me and helpful for others.

FOCUS OF STUDY

Solid research on hope has more traditionally been carried out with the chronically ill, the elderly, and health care professionals. There exists a dearth of research on the experience of hope in healthy individuals. As pertains to this inquiry, no other studies, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, have focused on the experience of hope in the lives of midlife reentry women.

Hope is viewed as a nebulous quality with strength sufficient to pull a person through in the darkest of nights. It is an inner working, a creative energy which encompasses more than a wish, a dream, or an emotion. It is experienced by those who meet obstacles in the path of life but struggle to find ways out. Paradoxically, times of despair and discouragement help to form hope, and for some, the greater the adversity, the stronger the hope that emerges. As Jevne (1993) pointed out, coping and hoping are interrelated and coping with little hoping is flat. Experiencing hope suggests a transcendent quality which flows from the inner being and presses one forward despite hindrances. Hope is talked about as conquering fear, and levels of hope as involving goals and a sense of the possible. Jevne goes on to speak of hope as a complex intangible which need not be spoken but can be seen in a twinkling eye or communicated through a listening ear.

Farran, Herth and Popovich (1995) defined hope as having four attributes. These involved the experiential, spiritual or transcendent, rational and relational processes. They indicated that hope cannot be studied without a knowledge of hopelessness, and that hope encompasses faith. Their views appeared to be congruent with those of Jevne (1993), claiming that faith is resilient and can be rooted in the self and others or in a religious context. The rational process was put forth as cognitive and associated with goals, resources, action, control, and time. They suggested it was often the feeling of loss of control over one's destiny that resulted in hopelessness. Hope was viewed as constituting a delicate balance between the experiences of difficult life situations, drawing upon one's spirituality, and maintaining a rational approach to what is happening (p. 9).

In this project, it is believed that each woman will hold a unique story of hope and that a part of this ongoing story is presently being lived out in her attendance at school. It is suggested she will have reentered the academic world with hope and vision for her future, not necessarily without apprehension. Her goals might be congruent with the postulation of Gilligan (1993) and involve a reevaluation of the caring responsibilities she has been carrying out as a woman. Erikson (1959, 1964), on the other hand, would likely claim she is being presented with a number of developmental challenges related to the conflict between tasks of generativity or stagnation. A successful outcome to this stage, according to Erikson, would involve taking responsibility in the community and caring for the next generation. This means that hope for the midlife reentry

woman might be found in the potential she envisions for herself as she completes her program and enters into the world in a caring way with a new career. Whatever her reasons, for the midlife woman returning to school, it is suggested that a sense of hope will constitute an important factor in her return to an academic setting.

The hopefulness that might be found in this study for women in midlife returning to school is in contrast to some firmly held traditional perspectives. Over the years, a woman, regardless of age, has most often been viewed primarily as mother, homemaker, and wife. Although there has been an increased interest in women entering, or reentering the work force, indications have been that women have not found this transition to be as significantly meaningful as they had anticipated (Gilligan, 1993; Offer & Sabshin, 1984). Conflict over the demands of both work and home have contributed to feelings of depression that some say have characterized the lives of middle aged women (Offer & Sabshin, p. 161). With the coming of the "empty nest" and the absence of children, midlife has further been depicted as a time of loneliness, alienation, and separation in which husbands and wives have needed to reacquaint themselves with each other (Rice, 1992). At the same time, typically occurring during midlife, it was postulated a sense of loss was experienced at the time of menopause for some women (Rice, 1992). Pearlman (1993) indicated from her research that women encountered a sudden and traumatic awareness of the acceleration and stigmatization of aging at midlife. Feelings of despair surrounded changes in

physical and sexual attractiveness. All in all, the concept of women at midlife has often been painted as a picture of despondency.

In contrast to this, the researcher of this present study, who is also a woman in midlife, encourages women to shake off the social images of what have stereotypically been considered as midlife phenomena, and to accept the process of growing older as a time of new hope and personal growth. It could be that aging might have more to do with the body than with the spirit and the mind. Montepare and Lachman (1989) found that women who were most satisfied with their lives were those who indicated the least discrepancy between their actual age and their subjective age identities. Outcomes from their study showed that as these women increased in age, their scores reflected decreasing personal fears of aging. Along with this, a positive correlation was revealed in their research between age acceptance and life satisfaction. This researcher wonders whether a strong sense of hope would also have been present in these women had this been an area of study.

Since an integral part of hope involves overcoming obstacles, it is speculated there might be problems to surmount for midlife reentry women, and that innovative coping strategies will be involved in their return to school. Time constraints, expense, family, and career obligations are but a few of the hindrances that might need consideration as midlife women take on the role of student in their hopes of completing an academic program. Research studies of reentry women indicated their multiple responsibilities at home, in society, and at

work as requiring a precarious balance (Ekstrom, Beier, Davis, & Gruenberg; King & Bauer, 1988) and oftentimes leading to emotional distress (Gilbert, Manning, & Ponder, 1980). Other inquiries (Kinnier and Townley, 1986) revealed reentry women experiencing value conflicts between intimate relationships and personal independence, as well as role conflicts around career versus family obligations. The lives of midlife reentry women appear to be complex and comprised of numerous life experiences. This study purports to look at the experience of hope in women returning to school at midlife.

RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE

My interest in studying the experiences of hope in midlife women returning to school arises from my own experience as a midlife woman who has gone back to academic study after several years of absence. I wonder whether the experiences of other women are the same as mine? Hope has played a significant part in my life and I am keenly interested in listening to and understanding hope as it is described in the lives of other middle aged reentry women. It is with a sense of anticipated camaraderie and benevolence that I have settled on this topic and have chosen to enter into a personally meaningful area of study. Implicitly imbedded in my interest is a desire to learn about hope and the part it plays in the lives of midlife women returning to school so that I might be more able to use this understanding for myself and in my counselling profession.

I am aware of the strength in hope that has been present, or absent, for others as I work in a number of capacities with women and married couples. I also recognize the hope found for people as they listen to hopeful stories presented from the experience of another's life. Relating from my experience as both speaker and participant in numerous women's groups and gatherings, I agree with the findings of Rountree (1993). She has concluded from her Workshops and from those women with whom she has talked, that women are encouraged by the life stories of other women and are responsive to the changes they have made in their lives. "Living examples remain the best source of inspiration ... women are [hungry] for personal stories that inspire and invite introspection ..." (p. 8), and, I might add, bring hope.

For me, hope is largely active, and from certain perspectives, at certain times, I act on my hope to achieve what it is I am seeking, whether this be peace of mind or academic credit. My experience with midlife has not been consistent with that suggested by Pearlman (1993), Offer and Sabshin (1984), and Rice (1992). Indeed, midlife for me has been a time of fresh hopes and new challenges. Engaging in this study as a way of understanding hope is congruent with the hopeful way I prefer to work with people and live my life.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this present inquiry is: 1) to describe the experience of hope in the lives of midlife reentry women; 2) to gain an understanding of the

experience of hope in the lives of midlife women who are returning to school; 3) to look at how hope is maintained in these women; 4) to describe the short term effects of the Workshop on the hope of the participants.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of the literature helps to focus the study and assists the researcher in knowing how others have approached similar areas of interest. A dilemma exists, however, since a literature review taking place prior to carrying out the research can bias the researcher's thinking and limit openness to that which is being studied (Patton, 1990, p. 163). In this inquiry, a brief review of the literature was conducted at the beginning of the project as the researcher was focusing on the topic under inquiry. This was then elaborated upon to incorporate a more comprehensive literature review following completion of the inquiry. In this review of existing literature, the researcher discusses the following topics: hope, reentry women, and midlife.

HOPE

From a philosophical perspective, the significance of hope was regarded by several great philosophers. Day (1969), in his article expounding upon hope, talks about Hume, Kant, and Aquinas, and laments the more current neglect of hope as a philosophical area of interest. Hume, in his famous A Treatise of Human Nature viewed hope and fear as opposite emotions with the power to destroy, alternate or mix with one other. An alternation between the two emotions depended on whether the event happening was regarded by the

individual as good or bad, certain or probable. This meant, for example, when an event was good and certain, a person felt hope and joy at the prospect of the event. However, when the event was regarded as bad and probable, then fear and grief were associated with the event. Kant asked the question in his Critique of Pure Reason, "What may I hope?" and indicated this query as one of the fundamental problems of philosophy. He responded by speaking about two important hopes, the first being hope that happiness was proportioned to virtue or goodness, and the second hope that the soul was immortal. This then speaks of hopes that God exists and there is life after death. Aquinas, in his Summa Theologica discussed hope in the contexts of passions or emotions, and theology. He wrote of hope as an expectation brought about by man's thoughts and desires. From a theological perspective, hope is founded in God and considered not as an emotion but as a virtue. From the viewpoint of hope as emotion, hope was said by Aquinas to enable action, since the individual's awareness of a difficulty caused amounts of concentration and passion sufficient to effectively overcome the obstacle.

Pruyser (1986), in his discussion on maintaining hope in times of encountering difficulties, cited the works of French existentialist, Gabriel Marcel (1944). This perspective maintained hope as a sense of *being* rather than *having*, and the source of hope, according to Marcel, is God. In describing the essence of hope, Marcel suggested using the verb *hoping* in contrast to the noun *hope*, since hoping denotes action and process rather than a hope, which involves some object

or desirable thing, as for instance in a hope for sunny weather. Hoping, Marcel believed, is introspective and centered on existential conditions that have more to do with hoping such things as being healed when sick or hoping for freedom from captivity. Since hoping, as viewed by Marcel, is more a state of responsiveness than it is a determining of the will, hoping subsequently arises in times of adversity when one feels trapped or without personal recourse. "One's grounds for hoping do not lie in the facts of reality, but in the ways in which reality has thus far disclosed itself to the person and in the meanings which that person has found in these disclosures" (Pruyser, 1986, p. 125). This is to say that people hold different hopes from each other, and adversity can alter their views of reality causing them to hope in new ways. The hoping person, according to Marcel and Pruyser, views the world as an open-ended process, with experience and knowledge ongoing, and realities ever-changing in response to adversity.

Today, much of the current interest in hope focuses on the adversities faced by critically ill patients and finding ways in which their sense of hope might be better understood and subsequently enhanced. Although the positive effect of hoping in relation to an elevated sense of well-being has been widely recognized by health professionals, very few studies have looked at hope in healthy populations.

Dufault and Martocchio (1985) stated that studying hope is useful in giving guidance to nursing action. It helps to provide insights into how hope functions and how nursing staff might facilitate or support their patients' sense of hope.

The researchers collected clinical data over two years on thirty-five cancer patients aged 65 years or older. Using their findings, the data was generalized and confirmed in another longitudinal study with forty-seven terminally ill persons aged 14 years and older. They defined hope as a "multidimensional dynamic life force characterized by a confident yet uncertain expectation of achieving a future good which, to the hoping person, is realistically possible and personally significant" (p. 380). Outcomes of their study indicated hope as a complex process involving many thoughts, feelings, and actions that change with time. The researchers conceptualized hope as made up of two interrelated spheres having six dimensions in common. Generalized hope and particularized hope comprised these two spheres. They differed mostly in their degrees of abstraction with particularized hope expressed in more concrete terms regarding what is specifically hoped for. Dufault and Martocchio identified the following six common dimensions of hope: affective, cognitive, behavioral, affiliative, temporal, and contextual. In their study, the affective component of hope has to do with sensations and emotions, while the cognitive part was related more to thinking, remembering, learning, perceiving, wondering, generalizing and interpreting. Their findings regarding the behavioral dimension centred on the action part of the hoping process while the affiliative component of hope referred to the individual's relatedness or involvement beyond the self. This affiliative dimension pertains to such aspects of hope as social interaction, mutuality, other-directedness, and self-transcendence. The temporal dimension experienced by

persons in their study focuses on the past, present, and future, claiming hope is not only future oriented but the past and present also play a part in the process of hope. The contextual dimension of their outcomes has to do with life situations, such as physical well-being, financial security, or ability to fulfill role expectations, which surround and influence an individual's hoping experience. This study revealed each of these six dimensions as interacting in complex ways to form the hoping process in critically ill patients.

In a study investigating the processes of hoping in adults aged 20 - 58 who were undergoing bone marrow transplantation for leukemia, Ersek (1992) discovered the main process described by participants centered around maintaining their hope. She found that many participants denied ever losing all hope, and that a generalized sense of hope was vital in their maintenance of hope. Patients did this by dealing with the negative possibilities of their illness and allowing themselves to become fully engaged in all the emotions surrounding that confrontation. This introspective process appraised the illness as a threat having the potential to result in loss, and perhaps death. Ersek categorized this as "Dealing With It." Next, participants in the study managed the impact of the illness by attending therapy and by controlling their responses to the disease. This latter response was categorized as "Keeping It in Its Place." To accomplish this, participants instituted a number of strategies, such as avoiding thinking or talking about the negative, keeping distracted, and reframing the disease as a positive experience. As patients in the study first struggled with, and then

synthesized, the two seemingly contradictory processes of "Dealing With It" and "Keeping It in Its Place", they were able to transcend each process and sustain a sense of hope for themselves despite the illness. Ersek talks about the need to acknowledge threatening information, since avoiding this leads to vulnerability regarding the risks involved in that information. Becoming unduly concerned with the negative information, on the other hand, leaves the person at risk of depression and hopelessness and fear. She states that her findings suggest that "in order to cope and to maintain hope, people must be able to take a threat and Keep It in Its Place" (p. 888).

Hinds and Martin (1988) studied the process through which adolescents with cancer helped themselves to achieve a sense of hope during their cancer experience. They sampled fifty-eight adolescents in different stages of treatment and found that other people, such as nurses, could influence their process of hoping. Data collection took the form of structured interviewing with open-ended questions asking for responses to queries such as, "When you think of the word 'hopefulness' what kinds of images or thoughts come to mind? What kinds of things do you hope for? What other kinds of things do you do to help yourself feel more hopeful?" Outcomes of the study indicated that the hopeful process was self-sustaining and induced from the following four sequential core concepts or phases: cognitive discomfort, distraction, cognitive comfort, and personal competence. Cognitive discomfort took place immediately after the adolescent became aware of negative thoughts about the illness. This involved strategies of

thought stopping in which participants interrupted disheartening cognitions, and reflection in which adolescents reached personal conclusions about their difficult circumstances. In this study, "negative thoughts about personal survival and suffering activate[d] their efforts to achieve the more desired state of hopefulness" (p. 337). The second phase in achieving a state of hopefulness for adolescents in this study centered around distraction and focused on cognitive/behavioral activities that lead to concentration on neutral or positive matters. For the most part, this phase required the most time and energy and was accomplished by using such strategies as keeping busy, minimizing the seriousness of the diagnosis, trusting God, internalizing support from others, and feeling self-satisfaction from what had already been mastered in treatment. The third phase, recognized as cognitive comfort, was characterized by hopefulness and the extent to which success was experienced in temporarily forgetting cancer. In this phase, an inner equilibrium was restored, tension reduced, and motivation created to accomplish what needed to be done. Hopefulness was defined as "the degree to which the adolescents possess a comforting or life-sustaining, reality-based belief that a positive future exists for themselves or others" (p. 339). The fourth phase, personal competence, was required for adolescents to continue with their sense of hope throughout their experience with cancer. This transcendent-like quality involved resilience, resourcefulness, and adaptability when health was seriously threatened.

McGee (1984) looked at hope as it was viewed from other disciplines and came up with an operational definition that involved a model of hope contrasting hope with hopelessness. The usefulness of this model could be found, she claimed, in its application to situations of health and crises having to do with stress and transition. Although McGee believed hope strengthens the physiological and psychological aspects of a person's life, she described hope as "a fragile blanket covering the various emotions experienced by the person encountering illness" (p. 34). She postulated hope as first centering on a stimulus for action and followed by a rational response involving feelings, thoughts, expectations and actions chosen to move the individual towards a desired state of being. The response decided upon was based on the perceived significance of the goal, likely solutions to the problem, and calculated probabilities for the action's success. The cognitive, social, psychological, and physiological factors of an individual have both internal and external dimensions and make up the calculated probabilities basis of hope. Cognitions have to do with the input of information from the environments while social aspects of probabilities are derived from interactions with others. Psychologically, she points out that successful coping mechanisms in the past foster a belief in the success of present coping strategies for the current situation. Physiologically, there exists an initial need for energy to invest in the hoping process. The external dimensions of hope focus on the person's environment, significant others, and transcendental beliefs. She goes on to speak of hope as maturational, with childhood a time described as "full of

hope" (p. 37). Children come to learn about their limitations and those of others as hope becomes more reality based and differentiated from wishing. McGee suggested that mature adults are more aware of their competencies and can approach hope and hopelessness more realistically. On the basis of her synthesis of definitions of hope, McGee drew up a model of hope illustrating hopefulness and hopelessness as polar opposites with likely responses to illness ranging from unjustifiably hopeful to unrealistically hopeless. Hopelessness represented an extreme state of despair entailing a complete loss of hope.

Jevne (1993) discussed hope from the perspective of enhancing hope in the chronically ill, speaking of hope as complex, intangible, and set in the context of time. "[Hope] draws on the past, is experienced in the present and is aimed at the future" (p. 123). The goal of the hoping process is talked about in terms of coping with the uncertainties brought on by fear and despair. Hope, according to Jevne, does not always appear as logical since it is not always based on present realistic information. Hope is therefore more than a calculation of probabilities based on information available at a present time. She proposed two levels of hope, these being specific and intangible. Goals or desires constitute the specific hopes of an individual while a more general sense of the possible makes up the intangible part of hoping. The reader is introduced to a number of hope enhancing strategies that persons in helping capacities might extend to their patients. These include authentic caring and communicating this care, listening to the patient's whole story, making something happen regardless of how small it

might seem, telling hope stories, and identifying a hope building ritual that engages the patient. Other suggestions for hopeful coping were comprised of imaging the hopeful outcome, thereby helping to focus energy in therapeutic ways, thinking of a hope model to help objectify coping styles, using humor, and finding symbols of hope which carry special meaning beyond their concreteness. As well as suggesting specific strategies that the caregiver might use to enhance hope in a patient, Jevne posed the practical questions of how one looks for, and encourages, an aspect of hope in difficult situations. A number of guidelines are given which assist the caregiver in responding to these queries. The article concludes with a caution for professional health care workers to look after their own sense of hope.

Stotland (1969) defined hope as "an expectation greater than zero of achieving a goal" (p. 2). He proposed the hopefulness of an individual as depending upon the level of this expectation or the probability of achieving the goal as perceived by that person. Hope is therefore regarded by Stotland as an expectation about goal attainment. Motivation to achieve the goal is related not only to the probability of attaining the goal but to the importance of that goal as it is regarded by the hoping person. Positive affect is associated with a high probability of achieving the goal, while anxiety is experienced by the person with a lower perceived ability to reach the goal. Fulfilling a goal expectation subsequently requires an action and according to Stotland, people who are hopeful are usually active, vigorous, and energetic.

Snyder (1993, 1994) held to a concept of hope somewhat similar to that of Stotland, defining hope as "the sum of the mental willpower and waypower that you have for your goals" (p. 5). The fundamental premise upon which Snyder built his hope theory rested upon his belief that "human beings, from the youngest to the oldest, are goal-directed creatures" (p. 284). He claimed the specific goals one hopes for are of significant personal magnitude, while vague, undefined goals have difficulty providing the "mental spark to get us moving" (p. 7). From his perspective, the ability one possesses to pursue a goal in spite of hindrances comes from a knowledge that previous problems have been successfully overcome. It is the most willful people, he contends, who are the ones who overcome difficulties. Snyder speaks about high-hope persons and how the high-hope thinking of these individuals provides a special advantage when problems arise. He claims the hoping process depends in large part on what persons think about themselves in relation to their goals. A person's thoughts then are related to both their inner and outer environments and consequently influence hoping behaviors. Snyder (1993) viewed hope in contrast to those who regarded hope as one of the fundamental emotions. He does not imply that emotions are irrelevant, but rather that they reflect the appraisals one makes of their goal-related activities. The high-hope person's analysis of their goal attainment as highly probable leads to a focus on success rather than failure, a sense of challenge, and a relatively positive emotional state. Conversely, the low-hope person's perceptions of the probability of goal attainment leads to a focus on failure rather

than success, feelings of ambivalence, and a relatively negative emotional state during goal-related activities.

Summary

Hope as an area of interest has held the attention of individuals for a number of years. In more recent times, hope has been explored from the perspective of health. As studies have focused on hope, the theory and knowledge they have produced has led to new understandings which in turn have allowed for the development of strategies and techniques to enhance a sense of hope and well-being in patients. Dufault and Martocchio (1985) viewed hope as a multidimensional life force, while Ersek (1992) described the process whereby participants in her study maintained their sense of hope. Hinds and Martin (1988) found the hopeful process in adolescents with cancer was self-sustaining and McGee (1984) developed a model of hope along a dimension of hopefulness and hopelessness. Jevne (1993) discussed strategies of enhancing hope in the chronically ill while Stotland (1969) and Snyder (1993, 1994) looked at hope more in terms of goal orientation. Regardless of the diverse perspectives from which hope has been studied, a wide recognition of the benefits of hope on feelings of health in both well and ill populations leads researchers to continue their investigations in hope.

REENTRY WOMEN

Kahnweiler and Johnson (1980) identified developmental concerns reflecting the midlife years from existing literature on adult development. They tested this with a sample of forty women aged 30 - 50 years who were returning to either college or university. The developmental information upon which these concerns were based was drawn from the works of Levinson (1978), Gould (1972), Lowenthal (1975), and Wiersma (1978). A synthesis of this information resulted in the developmental concerns being defined in terms of introspection, concern about physical development and appearance, awareness of time limitations, concerns centered on changing in the role as mother, concerns centered on changing in the role of wife, concerns centered around changes in the role as child, and feelings of uniqueness. The occurrence of a culminating event specific to midlife was also investigated in this study, as was the midlife role of mentor and protégé. Data was collected for the inquiry through individual interviews, responses to a set of verbal questions, and a developmental concerns questionnaire. Findings from the study indicated that some developmental concerns occurred to a significant degree in the lives of women returning to school at midlife. These concerns, as reflected in the project, were introspective concerns in which the women looked within themselves to examine their mental and emotional processes. As well, outcomes of the study showed significant concern around changes in the role as wife, and concerns about physical development and appearance. Both culminating events and mentor experiences

also appeared as potentially significant aspects of midlife development for these participants. With regards to the culminating event considered to have a particularly significant meaning for the individual, respondents in the study described either attitudes of loss, as in divorce or separation, or an attitude of self-development and renewal, as evidenced in their return to school. Only one woman cited her child leaving home as a significant event. The existence of a mentor relationship was found in the study to be a common experience for almost 75% of the reentry women, with this relationship happening after reaching 30 years of age. The mentor was an older person who had contributed to the emotional support of the reentry woman. Serving as mentor provided emotional gains for almost half the women in the study, with this relationship most often being referred to by participants as involving a friend. Kahnweiler and Johnson, in discussing the implications of their research, suggest that returning to school for women might comprise part of an ongoing process of midlife development.

Hooper and Traupmann (1983) compared two groups of women over 50 years with one group consisting of University students enrolled for credit, and the other group involving non-student or home oriented women. Matched groups of women (N=106) were compared on measures of subjective age and attitudes toward age, perceived happiness and satisfaction, perceived physical health, number and severity of depressive symptoms, self-esteem and autonomy. Participants responded to numerous open-ended questions, gave answers to a lengthy questionnaire consisting of questions from the Aging Women Project

(Wood, 1980), and completed the Hopkin's Symptom Checklist 90 (Essex, Klein, Jones, & Benjamin, 1979) as well as the Structural Analysis of Social Behavior (SASB) model (Benjamin, 1979). Results of this research indicated both the returning women students and the comparison group thought of themselves as middle-aged or younger, and they conceived of "old" as at least 70 years of age. For both groups in the study, their own age was a relatively unimportant factor in their lives. The results of the inquiry revealed the student group as feeling more physically healthy and reporting fewer and less severe depressive symptoms. This study indicated they were also more self-disciplined and more able to manage their time. No differences were shown in the inquiry between the two groups on a measure of self-esteem or self-love, with both groups scoring in the "high" range. Regarding life satisfaction and happiness, neither group in the project indicated a significant difference from the other, with both groups scoring between "somewhat" and "very" on measures indicating their happiness and satisfaction with their lives.

Sands and Richardson (1984) interviewed 74 undergraduate midlife women aged 30 - 49 years who were returning to University in full-time studies. The purpose of their research was to assess reported satisfaction with their school performance, rating of the priority of school in relation to other priorities, and mental health symptoms. Factor analyses of symptoms and stepwise multiple regression analyses were performed. In regards to satisfaction with school performance, it was found in the study that factors related to the educational

experience rather than demographic factors (e.g. marital situation, number of years since most recent educational experience) contributed to satisfaction with performance in midlife reentry women. The inquiry showed that participants who indicated they had no obstacles, such as scheduling problems, time pressures, and home-school conflicts, were more satisfied with their school performance while those who had obstacles were less satisfied with their work. Those who were more advanced in their education were also more satisfied with their school performance. In relation to the importance of school compared to other responsibilities, the study found that having employment while attending school affected the rating of school positively as long as the number of hours worked was not too great. Women's evaluation of the importance of school was found in the study to be related to their perception of public attitudes toward midlife reentry women. Those who believed others were generally positive about their reentry rated school highly while those who believed other people viewed their return to school negatively gave school importance a lower rating. Their study also found that women at the highest risk of experiencing symptoms of stress, including depression, anxiety, and compulsivity were younger middle aged women and women with relatively low incomes.

In response to a mailed questionnaire, Thacker and Novak (1991) studied 276 Canadian midlife women returning to University. All participants had fewer than 5.5 course credits. They compared one group of these women aged 35 - 44 years with another group of the women aged 45 - 64 years. Using a life event

framework that focused on stresses from the environment to describe normative age-graded life events, non-normative life events, and historical life events, the researchers added a self-initiated life event as the fourth life event. Their rationale in doing this centered on the life event framework overlooking the ability of persons to take active roles in their environments and to initiate change. The return of a middle aged woman to University was considered to be a self-initiated life event. In using this framework, Thacker and Novak looked at the stress of University life, the methods women used to cope with their reentry, and their adaptations to the demands of school. Results of this research indicated that older reentry women often experienced less financial pressure to advance at work or to find new careers, subsequently viewing their reentry more as a form of personal growth rather than career development. The findings indicated that the younger group of women in the study experienced more stress than the comparison group. Younger participants were shown to feel more pressure in their roles at home and to feel more pressed for time, frequently sacrificing family relationships in order to achieve academically. The project indicated this younger group of women reported less satisfaction with their University education and generally less life satisfaction. Younger women in the study appeared to have fewer supports to help them cope with the stress of reentry and in relation to the older group, felt they received little psychological support from their children. Compared to the older group, the younger participants reported more strain in all spheres of their lives, including areas of marriage, work, and parenting. They

were found to spend more time on school work and felt this added to their time pressures. The older reentry group were shown to have children who more likely attended University and supported their mother's reentry. Regarding adaptation, both groups of women considered their life experiences as a positive adjunct to their student roles, with some reentry women modeling themselves after their teachers.

Mezirow (1991), in his 1975 a national study of women returning to college in the United States, carried out structured interviews with eighty-three women. His area of interest centered around adult learning and how persons become active rather than passive learners. In his study, Mezirow looked at how adults relinquish their familiar ways of accepting whatever is presented to them and break through their learning boundaries to acquire their own perspectives. In attempting to understand adult learning, Mezirow explores the processes whereby individuals frame their references and structure their meanings. Perspective transformation, as defined by Mezirow, refers to "the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world" (p. 167). A change in perspective can occur as a result of dilemmas arising from challenges to deeply held values and meanings, or from externally imposed dilèmmas such as death or divorce, gaining a promotion or being passed over, receiving a poor evaluation or failing an examination. The process of transformation can begin through any personally awakening experience, as in classroom discussions or reading a book

(p. 168). In his national study with reentry women, Mezirow (1975) found ten phases of perspective transformation, beginning with a disorienting dilemma and followed by critical self-examination and feelings of guilt or shame. This led to a reevaluation of previously held assumptions, an awareness that the woman was not alone in her discontent and that others had negotiated similar changes. This brought about an exploration of possibilities for something new and subsequent planning for a course of action. Putting these plans into action required new knowledge and skills, and as the new role was assumed, feelings of mastery and self-confidence allowed the reentry woman to integrate the new perspective into her life (p. 168, 169).

A comprehensive review of research from 1980 to 1990 was undertaken by Padula (1994) with a view to compiling data pertaining to reentry women. This article began with a discussion of demographic information, pointing out that women aged 25 years and older made up 48.6% of the total college enrollment growth in the United States from 1980 to 1988 (United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1990) and suggesting present trends indicate more women will earn more doctoral degrees than will men by the year 2001 (United States Department of Education, 1990). In her review of existing data, Padula indicated a great deal of variety in the outcomes of studies and therefore her subsequent inability to make generalized statements of fact regarding reentry women. The only piece of correlating information she claimed to find in all studies had to do with reasons for reentry which pointed out that women returned

to school for vocational interests. Padula commented that current research pertaining to reentry women appeared to be a collection of often unrelated information and that many limitations in the different studies made it difficult for her to evaluate the studies that did exist. She did point out in her review, however, that needs and characteristics of reentry women differ from traditional students and that reentry women are concerned about vocational, family, and financial issues, as well as issues of self-growth and development. These concerns, she stated, showed the necessity of counselling and educational programs to meet the special needs of reentry women. She claimed the appropriateness for more stringently designed quantitative and qualitative research in the area of reentry women as being of prime importance since it would be through these means that counselling, advising, and educational requirements of reentry women could be identified and appropriately addressed.

Summary

In considering the research cited in this review, three studies seemed to reveal younger midlife women experiencing greater stress in their lives when compared to older midlife reentry women (Hooper & Traupmann, 1983; Sands & Richardson, 1984; Thacker & Novak, 1991). It appears that research focusing on reentry women has looked at a number of different aspects associated with reentry women and results of these studies have correspondingly reflected diverse findings. Kahnweiler and Johnson (1980) studied the midlife reentry woman from

a developmental perspective and suggested reentry might constitute a part of the midlife developmental process. Hooper and Traupmann (1983) compared two groups of midlife women, one group comprised of reentry women and the other group made up of a non-student population. Sands and Richardson (1984) investigated satisfaction with school performance, the priority of school in relation to other activities, and mental health in midlife women returning to school. Thacker and Novak (1991) looked at the stress of University life for Canadian midlife women, their coping methods, and their adaptations to the demands of school. Mezirow (1975, 1991) talked about the personal challenges and disorientations of new learnings for the reentry woman. As Padula (1994) discovered inconsistencies in the research regarding reentry women, she proclaimed her limited ability to evaluate and integrate existing information.

MIDLIFE

Considerable variation exists as to the years claimed to cover middle age. Stevenson (1977) referred to midlife as encompassing the 40 to 60 year age span, while Levinson (1978) stated midlife transition occurred between 40 and 45 years. Vaillant (1977a) believed that middle age occurred between 30 and 50 years. Since there is no general consensus regarding the years of one's life attributed to midlife, the matter becomes an issue of personal preference and experience.

Middle age, according to Erikson (1959, 1964) is represented by a number of challenges or developmental tasks that typically influence every aspect of a

person's being. He viewed midlife as one of the eight developmental "Stages of Man" and one which involved a crisis between a sense of generativity and a sense of stagnation. He indicated the successful resolution of these psychosocial tasks resulted in the middle years as being a time of life characterized by personal satisfaction and happiness. If these tasks were not accomplished, he claimed that stagnation and increasing disillusionment set in.

The developmental tasks postulated by Erikson (1959) involved adjustments to the physical, occupational, social, parental, marital, leisure, and existential issues of life. Physically, individuals came to realize their bodies were not in the same shape as formerly and that psychological changes in life style and health habits were required. Regarding one's work life, seniority and experience held the potential of middle age proving to be a fruitful period of one's career. There were other instances however, where midlife persons were overlooked, unappreciated, or laid-off. At these times, it was claimed that feelings of disappointment and lack of fulfillment set in, leading persons to rethink what they wanted to do for the remainder of their lives. Erikson believed that participation in community life oftentimes became important as children left home. As well, marital needs were reassessed, job demands changed and new interests were pursued. A concern for aging parents was experienced as midlife persons watched their parents grow old, retire and die. Along with the multiple challenges involved in these developmental tasks, Erikson postulated that midlife became a time of finding new meaning to the existential questions of life.

Key to the successful resolution of this crises, whether man or woman, was the ability to transcend the here and now self interests in favor of the next generation. Meaning and value, Erikson (1959, 1964) contended, was found in the ability to guide and aide the next generation while others, unable to successfully find such meaning, were characterized by feelings of stagnation or boredom. The strength required to bridge this crises was found in the virtue of care. He stated:

> In adulthood, however, you learn to know whom you can take care of ... [it] is called the maintenance of the world, that middle period of the life cycle when existence permits you and demands you to consider death as peripheral and to balance its certainty with the only happiness that is lasting: to increase, by whatever is yours to give, the good will and the higher order in your sector of the world (1964, p. 124).

Gilligan (1993), in her studies of women, pointed out that the virtue of care has fully embodied the woman's existence and has not been a part of the developmental process to be relegated only to midlife. In women's descriptions of themselves, their identity was defined in the context of relationship, care, and responsibility. Women were often found to subordinate achievement and career success in favor of relationship with others (p. 171). The concept of development and maturity, she claimed, must be viewed from the perspective of gender, since men and women constructed their worlds differently and measured maturity with different standards. She found that if women made a distinction between choosing to help rather than attempting to please others, the activity of care became a

source of personal strength and integrity. In response to the concept of generativity at midlife, she claimed this reflected a male standard of development since women have been engaged in relationship and caring for some years previous. For Gilligan, a regard of the midlife years as a time of generativity and caring ignored the reality of what has happened for women in the years between. This attitude, she stated, "tears up the history of love and of work" (p. 171). The major transitions in women's lives, whether or not in the middle years of life, are therefore perceived as involving changes in her understandings and activities of care.

Offer & Sabshin (1984), in their review of literature pertaining to midlife women, noted that the lives of these women were more strongly tied to family and less strongly to work than are those of men. The authors pointed out the resolution of work and home responsibilities as not seeming to be completely worked through, since widespread depression was experienced by many women who attempted to balance both jobs (p. 161). The demands of homemaker, wife, and mother continued to characterize women in midlife, with additional responsibilities for aging parents and other extended family members often adding to the burden. The 'empty nest' experienced by those in midlife was originally held to bring lowered morale but more recently it has been indicated there is little negative impact when children leave home (Lowenthal, Fiske, & Chiriboga, 1972; Mitchell & Helson, 1990).

Mitchell and Helson (1990) showed that women in their fifties experienced a prime of life involving good health, autonomy, and relationship. Their subjects consisted of a cross-sectional sample of 700 college educated women aged 26-80 years, of whom 60 were in their early fifties, as well as 118 members of a longitudinal sample from the same college who were in their early forties and early fifties. Each study was designed to determine the prime of life years but differed in some questions since the cross-sectional study was conducted in 1983 and the longitudinal study took place in 1989. The cross-sectional study measured quality of life, conditions of life, importance and satisfaction of various areas of life, and concerns and interests. The longitudinal study measured quality of life and sense of well-being, conditions of life, status level of work, satisfactions and dissatisfactions, and feelings about life. By using two samples, it was believed that the generality of high quality of life amongst women in their early fifties could be tested. Quality of life for both samples was rated by a single-item indicator, in which respondents reported whether the present time in their life was first rate, fair, or not so good. In both studies, middle aged women rated their quality of life most favorably, with the early fifties being regarded as the most favorable time of life for both groups. The inquiry indicated significant aspects of their lives at this time revolved around factors of living with a partner only, health, income, and concerns for parents. From a psychological perspective, women in their prime of life were characterized by engagement in the present with a relative absence of negative affect or need for change. Included in this was

an emphasis on an increased sense of autonomy found in the longitudinal study and a lack of interest in philosophical and religious issues found in the cross-sectional sample.

Dumbeck (1994), on the other hand, found that persons in midlife experienced a desire for personal integration that reached to the inner core of their existence. Her subjects consisted of twenty persons, nine women and eleven men who ranged in ages from 35 to 55 years, and who were experiencing a crisis in their midlife. Rather than quality of life being highly correlated with absence of negative affect, need for change or lack of interest in spiritual issues (Mitchell, 1990), Dumbeck found that midlife years were a time of change, self exploration, and renewal. A new found awareness of the range and intensity of emotions formed as past and present choices were examined, struggled with and then accepted. Religious or spiritual beliefs were reassessed and a desire for contribution to the world in a personally meaningful way gained in importance. A sense of inner peace and contentment grew as persons trusted in their process of life (p. 151).

Midlife involved a transition like no other, according to Corlett and Millner (1993). On the basis of their study, they claimed midlife had at its core a search for one's authenticity and unique mission or purpose in life. "Midlife transition, which typically occurs near the middle of life, is about matters of spirit, mission, and culture. Spirit refers to the need to feel connected to something greater than oneself, mission refers to one's purpose in life, and culture

refers to the society left for future generations" (p. 1). Corlett and Millner examined the way people experienced middle age by listening to people's stories of their midlife journeys and by using Jungian theory and typology. It was the desire of the authors to gain a more holistic view of the development of life phases as they pertained to the individuation process . The research method involved collecting data in interviews and through the *Myers Briggs Type Indicator*. Consistent themes and psychological type patterns were elucidated. They found from their research that feelings of discontent, boredom, anxiety and a sense of something missing were common in personalities who were experiencing midlife. Hard questions arose in their participants, such as: "Who am I really? What do I want to do with the time I have left in my life? Have my previous choices been good choices? What will it cost me to make changes in my life? Will any changes I make be worth it? What is the meaning of all this?" (p. 3). Some persons in the study described midlife as a pulling between the security of sameness in the past and the insecurity of growth in the future. The project revealed that losses were almost always involved, sometimes by choice, but just as often by death, divorce, job loss, or ill health. As well, risk and the fear of change were present as individuals in midlife were challenged to follow their unique inner wisdom. These findings were consistent with Jung (1960) who spoke about midlife as a time of discovering the shadow side of one's personality. This shift in perspective during the middle years of an individual's life often evoked a new assessment of values which frequently led to a discovery of the

spiritual. The research indicated this was sensed in participants feeling their life was part of something bigger and more important than the immediate. Although spirituality was difficult to define according to the researchers, it was experienced in a number of different ways which gave understanding, perspective, and mission to life.

Summary

Midlife is viewed as a span of life somewhere between the ages of 30 and 60 years. Considerable debate exists over the nature of midlife, with some claiming this stage of life as stressful and turbulent (Corlett & Millner, 1993; Dumbeck, 1994; Erikson, 1959) while others stating it as the prime time of a woman's life (Mitchell & Helson, 1990).

Erikson (1959) believed midlife individuals are challenged with a number of developmental tasks and that the virtue of care enables them to successfully resolve the crises which inevitably arise from these events. Gilligan (1993) noted the value of care as embodied in women's lives prior to midlife, and though care and compassion may be new qualities for men in middle age, they form the basis upon which women have entered into midlife. Offer and Sabshin (1984) supported the importance of a caring role in family relationships for midlife women, while Mitchell and Helson (1990) found women in their inquiry rated the early fifties as the most favorable time of life. Research carried out by Corlett and Millner (1993) and Dumbeck (1994) revealed the midlife years to be a

difficult life experience for their participants, though nevertheless an opportunity revealed in their studies for personal enlightenment and renewal.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of a literature review is to focus the study. In this inquiry, the research question centers on the experience of hope in the lives of midlife women returning to school. The preceding review of literature has looked at the central theme of hope from both a theoretical and practical perspective. Next, as information regarding reentry women was reviewed, the diversity of these studies and their findings became apparent. A look at literature regarding midlife indicated a general acknowledgment of this time of life as being one of change and personal reassessment.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The purpose of the inquiry is to gain an understanding of the experience of hope in the lives of midlife women returning to school. In order to realize this purpose, the qualitative case study has been selected as the research design most appropriate for providing in-depth descriptions and understandings of the phenomenon. In describing the method used to obtain the purpose of this research, this Chapter discusses the choice of case study as the research design, the suitability of case study for this project, and the philosophical underpinnings of the qualitative case study. The 'case' is then defined, and ways in which information is gathered for the study are talked about, followed by a discussion of the method by which the data is analyzed. The Chapter then speaks about the credibility, ethical considerations and delimitations of the study. A brief summary concludes this section of the study.

CHOOSING A RESEARCH DESIGN

As the researcher, it is important that the design chosen for this inquiry be one in which each woman is given ample opportunity to describe her experiences of hope. The setting provided allows for thorough reflection and the telling of "her story." As much as possible, the intent is to grasp descriptions and stories of hope as they spontaneously unravel for each participant. In order to do this, the

researcher envisions "being there" with each participant to catch a glimpse of her world. To maximize these understandings and descriptions of hope, avenues of obtaining information other than the interview were considered. This led to an envisioning of hope as it might emerge should participants construct a hope collage, bring an object representative of hope, or attend a Workshop. To accommodate these ideas, a flexible research design was required for the study.

In summary, a research design was needed which would provide opportunity for personal interaction, a variety of methods for gathering descriptive information, and in-depth understandings of the phenomenon of hope.

CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN

Case study is an ideal design for discovering insights, in-depth understandings, and meanings (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990; Stake, 1994, 1995). It is frequently selected when that which is being explored is of very special interest (Stake, 1995, p.xi). Vignettes of participant's personal experiences often help to describe the case. Ideas in harmony with those of the reader are frequently reflected in other's stories, leading the reader to new understandings and meanings of the phenomenon (Stake, 1995). A special strength of case study involves its capacity to handle a variety of data sources (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).

Qualitative case study is a research design "in its own right" (Merriam, 1988, p. 5). It is a specific approach used to study phenomenon systematically

and it presents findings using descriptive words, understandings, and interpretations rather than numbers. It is particularistic in view of its concentration on a single phenomenon, program, or event. Within its own context, it seeks holistic descriptions and interpretations as it makes room for exploring the exceptional situation. Its primary purpose is one of knowing a case well and emphasizing its uniqueness (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). Although case study does not concern itself with the generalization of knowledge gained from its findings, vicarious interpretation often takes place by the reader since case study findings are usually presented with personal stories, easy-to-understand language, and concrete descriptions of the phenomenon (Stake, 1995). Outcomes from case studies therefore have the potential of evoking new meanings and understandings within the reading audience. On this basis, case study is said to be heuristic. Since diverse sources of data are frequently used in gaining information, research findings usually involve rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon being researched. Case studies depend on inductive reasoning for dealing with multiple sources of data. This means that concepts, hypotheses, and theories can emerge from the information.

PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

Merriam (1988) talks about the philosophical assumptions of the qualitative case study in terms of the qualitative paradigm. She equates the

theoretical underpinnings with the worldview of qualitative research, stating this does not mean qualitative research "equals" a case study, but rather that qualitative case study derives its philosophy from that of the qualitative paradigm (p. 16). The philosophical assumptions of case study resting upon the worldview of qualitative research allows the researcher a good deal of flexibility in approaching the research question, since few constrictions exist in acceptable methods of gathering information and analyzing data (Merriam, 1988). Flexibility in these areas allows for the creativity of the researcher and the participants in terms of how the data is explored, discovered, and interpreted. It is from the rich, thick descriptions of data that case study unfolds and gains its value.

The primary aim of qualitative research is to understand the meaning of an experience and how the parts of that experience interact to form a whole (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990; Stake, 1994, 1995). It follows, then, that the case study researcher seeks to understand how individuals derive meaning and make sense of their lives. The worldview consistent with such a purpose holds that there are multiple realities. This philosophical premise postulates the world as subjective, influenced by personal interaction, and in need of interpretation rather than measuring. Perceptions are based in beliefs, not in facts. Process rather than end is emphasized, and observations as well as intuitions form part of the information gathered, analyzed, and interpreted.

A further distinguishing feature of qualitative research revolves around the descriptive nature of its findings as contrasted to learnings presented in terms of numbers. The use of inductive reasoning to build concepts or hypotheses from data emerging from the inquiry is a characteristic of the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative case study. This type of research also requires fieldwork where the researcher goes to the people, setting, site, or institution to observe behavior in its natural setting.

Another significant element of the qualitative case study centers around the importance of the researcher in the study. In qualitative inquiry, the researcher becomes the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Since this main instrument is human, it follows that all ideas, observations, and interpretations are filtered through the researcher's worldview, values and perceptions (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). Case study research subsequently admits to the subjectivity of the researcher, claiming that value-free interpretive research is impossible. "Subjectivity is not seen as a failing needing to be eliminated but as an essential element of understanding" (Stake, 1955, p. 45). Accordingly, misunderstandings in interpretation arise from a weak method of study and a lack of awareness on the part of the researcher regarding self-perceptions and biases. To address the problem, an open clarification of values and preconceptions needs to be stated in the study.

DEFINING 'THE CASE'

In the qualitative case study design, 'the case' becomes the unit of analysis. The case is the focus of study and can be an individual, a program, an institution, a group, an event, or a concept (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990). Numerous events, participants, or phases of a process might be subsumed under the unit. The case is a "bounded system," meaning that the researcher limits what is to be included or excluded in the case (Merriam, 1988). According to Patton (1990), the key in determining the case is made by deciding, "what it is you want to be able to say something about at the end of the study" (p. 168). In accordance with Patton's definition (1990), the aim of this inquiry is to say something about the experience of hope in the lives of midlife reentry women. To reach such an understanding, this study of hope becomes bounded by factors of age, gender, and school reentry.

Two types of case studies exist. In the instrumental case study, research is carried out to study an issue in a particular case, while collective case study is an instrumental study encompassing several cases (Stake, 1995). In this research, the instrumental case study tells the story of each participant, focusing in on her experience of hope. The collective case study extends each case into one larger description of hope as the researcher looks for common themes and patterns amongst the several individual cases.

GATHERING INFORMATION

Since the qualitative case study lends itself to diverse methods of collecting information, this section of the Chapter discusses the three main ways in which data was chosen to be gathered in this inquiry. These sources of information for this study involved the individual participants, a data gathering session, and the individual interview.

The data gathering session involved a safe environment with a skilled facilitator whose role in the process centred around guiding and engaging the participants in specified activities. It was important for the purity of the data that the facilitator minimize her interaction with the group and that no summations be derived from group discussions and writings. For the researcher, a caution arose as to taking the backseat in discussions since she already knew the questions, had reflected on her understandings of these questions, and did not want to unduly influence the discussions with her peers. Subsequently, the researcher's limited interactions were restricted to affirming and paraphrasing the interactions taking place during group responses. Along with the role of the facilitator and the researcher, the question also arose as to what to call this data gathering session. The researcher decided it would be referred to as a Workshop, and henceforth, will be termed in this study as the Workshop. It did not, however, have many of the characteristics one would associate with a workshop, for example, debriefing of exercises.

Choosing the participants

An appropriate sampling strategy for qualitative case study is that of purposeful sampling, sometimes called criterion-based sampling. This provides a means of discovering, understanding and gaining insight into that which is being studied by selecting a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1988). Since the aim of this project is to gain an understanding of the experience of hope in the lives of women who are in midlife and returning to school, midlife reentry women were selected who were sufficiently articulate in both verbal and written form. Their competencies in these areas were deduced by the researcher as she observed and listened to each prospective participant and then requested a written paragraph describing a hopeful incident. Participants for the study were selected on the basis of six criteria, and no one who met these conditions was ruled out. The six criteria were: 2) female gender; 2) aged 40 to 60 years; 3) currently attending the University of Alberta; 4) registered in full-time studies sometime within the past three years; 5) able to appropriately contribute to a description of a hopeful experience; 6) able to attend a Workshop.

Women between the ages of 40 and 60 years were chosen by the researcher to represent the time of life commonly known as midlife. Although considerable variation exists as to the years that are believed to cover the midlife age range, the researcher concurred with the age span suggested by Stevenson (1977).

My rationale for requesting participants to be registered in a full-time program at some point within the past three years centered around my belief that such a commitment would probably be indicative of a purposeful engagement with the educational process. My hunch was that such a commitment would provide a convenient way of reaching those midlife women who probably possessed some experience with hope associated with their academic reentry.

In choosing participants for the study, posters were placed throughout the University of Alberta Campus asking those who might be interested in exploring their experience of hope to contact the researcher. The appropriate phone number was given. In response to the posters, three respondents were unable to meet on the workshop date and four others had not been involved in full-time studies within the past three years. In total, two women met all the criteria and were chosen for the study. Another three women heard of the study through the researcher, responding with enthusiasm and volunteering to take part. The remaining participant was myself. Except for one other participant and myself, all the informants were unknown to the researcher prior to the study.

The decision to involve myself as a full participant involved an intuitive belief this would provide me with a valuable learning experience in terms of personal insights, counselling skills, and researcher understandings. Observations, hunches, intuitions, and feelings were recorded in a personal journal and in field notes to help bring an awareness of my personal biases.

Following a telephone contact, arrangements were made to meet with each participant to gather "Life Experience Information" (Appendix A). This form requested demographic data and asked each woman to write a paragraph about a time when hope changed something in her life. This meeting provided an opportunity to determine the suitability of each participant for the inquiry. As well, the meeting allowed the researcher to establish rapport with each woman prior to the Workshop. Hunches, intuitions, and observations were employed by the researcher as each woman demonstrated her familiarity with hope in written and verbal ways. My inclusion as a full participant in the study was indicated and discussed with the informants at this time. The "Informed Consent Form" (Appendix B) was talked over and signed.

As I met with these women for the first time, I discovered my interest in the study escalating. I began to look forward to data collection with an enthusiasm and anticipation that flowed into eagerness. Each of the women seemed to have much to express. Some said they responded to the research because they were "looking for hope," others thought it might be hopeful for them in completing their thesis, while still some believed it would provide a personal growth experience. Some were flamboyant in their hopeful descriptions, and some were quietly reflective.

The Workshop

Qualitative case study tends to cast a wide net in gathering information, seeking multiple methods of data collection to provide in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Bromley, 1986). The researcher attempts to get as close as possible to what is being studied through observation, access to thoughts, feelings, and desires. Accordingly, as a means of gathering data to build the case study, participants were invited to a Workshop entitled, "Exploring Your Hope." Since qualitative research depends on rich, thick descriptions from the informed client, the researcher's hunch was that group interaction would create a synergistic atmosphere which would help instigate discussion and deepen insights, reflections, and meanings (Gladding, 1992). Hope House, located on the University campus in Edmonton, opened its doors to the inquiry and gave access to a location for both the Workshop and the individual interviews.

The Workshop took place one Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and was facilitated by the Counsellor at Hope House. In collaboration with the researcher, a variety of information gathering strategies were used, including open discussion and writing. In the writing exercises (Appendix C), for example, participants were asked to consider their lives as a book, and to write about the chapter of their life they were now in. Another exercise involved a request to reflect upon, and name, the chapters of their lives, including those years not yet completed. A 12 point Herth Hope Scale (Appendix D) was completed by each woman. This

served as an empirical means of providing data regarding the range of hope each was experiencing in her life at the time of the study. A collage was constructed and commented upon by each informant. Several of the women found this to be a meaningful exercise and wanted their collages returned. Photographs were subsequently taken of all the collages. At the conclusion of the Workshop, arrangements were made for follow-up, in-depth, individual interviews at Hope House. Each participant was requested to bring an object representative of her hope, and to be prepared to talk about how the object has been hope enhancing for her.

The Interview

The purpose of the interview, according to Becker (1986) is:

> to create an atmosphere which allows the research participant to unguardedly describe his/her life-world experiences of the phenomenon studied by the researcher. The focus is on the phenomenon in the interviewee's everyday world, the task is rich description by the interviewee with the encouragement of the interviewer (p. 109).

With such a goal in mind, and not wanting to lose the momentum of the group experience, individual, in-depth, interviews were completed within three weeks of the Workshop. Each woman was interviewed for approximately 70 minutes, with the researcher being interviewed by one of the participants.

For the researcher, several dilemmas arose regarding who would interview the researcher and when the interview would take place. The selection of who might interview the researcher was made on the basis of the participant's

willingness to assume this additional part in the study, the degree of comfort the researcher experienced with this participant, and the confidence the researcher felt in the participant's interviewing skills. As regards the interviewing procedure, it was felt that, for the researcher to be interviewed first, the researcher would likely be influenced by the interviewing style and probings of the interviewer, while to be interviewed last might influence the way in which the researcher responded to the questions. The choice was utlimately made to be interviewed last. This was indeed a methodological dilemma for the investigator.

All interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. The interview procedures closely resembled those of an open-ended interview procedure (Patton, 1990, pp. 284-288), with the following questions being discussed and probed at various points throughout the session: 1) When you reflect back on the Workshop, what stands out most for you? 2) How is it that this object has been important to you relative to hope? 3) What has been the least hopeful time of your life? 4) What has been the most hopeful time of your life? 5) What role has hope played in your return to school at this time in your life? 6) Is there anything else you might like to tell me that would help me understand your experience of hope?

The interview formed another integral part of the data gathering process. Several women expressed their comfort with being interviewed at Hope House. The interview process was dynamic and relational. It centered on the real-life world of each woman and evoked descriptions of all kinds. Interview questions

acted as a springboard in prompting in-depth reflections of hope. Other than the questions, the researcher provided very little direction regarding what individual participants talked about. Skills of listening in a nonjudgmental and attentive way were used, as was the skill of paraphrasing in order to probe deeper, prompt further discussion, and clarify responses. Times of pain and joy were relived as hope was reflected upon and stories flowed. Individual representations of hope were displayed, discussed, and then photographed.

For me as the researcher, there was an anticipation and exhilaration as I waited to hear each participant's story. There existed an excitement about the challenge of prompting descriptions that would best describe unique and hopeful experiences. Maintaining a balance, yet pressing to the point of speechlessness (Becker, 1986) without provoking frustration or impatience, proved to be a constant process of emotional sensitivity and mental sifting as information was presented.

Approximately eight months after the interview the researcher met with each of the women. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the research findings and give each participant an opportunity to confirm, correct, or elaborate upon the findings. The requests of the women were respectfully considered and the findings altered accordingly. This meeting also provided a time for each woman to discuss any feelings she held towards the project. It was at this time she decided upon the pseudonym she wished to have used for herself throughout

the study. Findings related to the researcher were reviewed and commented upon by the participant who interviewed her.

ANALYZING THE INFORMATION

Data analysis is the way in which sense is made of the data. In qualitative research, the researcher becomes the primary instrument used for gathering and analyzing information. There is no specific time when analysis begins, since the first observation, interview, or article constitutes the collection of data and the beginning of analysis. Emerging insights, hunches, educated guesses, and tentative hypotheses are employed as part of the data to be considered and verified. When data gathering is completed, analysis becomes more dynamic and intensive.

From the beginning of the study, incoming information was filed topically, some more conveniently according to the cross-case study, and other data filed more conveniently on the basis of each woman's case. Information filed has included field notes from the researcher's observations of the women's interpersonal interactions (e.g. gestures and tone of voice). As well, personal journal writings have recorded general impressions and feelings regarding the initial meeting, Workshop, interviews, and overall study. Keeping a complete audit trail has involved retaining documents and recording all that has been done so it becomes possible for another researcher to duplicate the study.

In this qualitative case study, data was analyzed by first bringing together all the information and organizing the material into a study data base (Yin, 1994). Transcripts and writings from the Workshop were read and reread a number of times, with comments, impressions, and queries posed as if "holding a conversation with the data" (Merriam, 1988, p. 131). A great deal of deep thinking and reflection occurred as the researcher pondered the meanings of what participants were saying and how they were related to their experiences of hope. Throughout the process, the researcher found it necessary to return again and again to the question of the inquiry, reminding herself that hope was the focus of the study and it was hope she wanted to say something about at the end of the study.

Merriam (1988), in her discussion of analyzing data in case studies, talks about identifying units of information as the basis upon which categories are devised. She indicates these units of information as consisting of a phrase, a sentence, or a paragraph, and meeting two conditions: 1) the unit should be heuristic, meaning that it shows information relevant to the study and induces thinking beyond that particular piece of information; 2) the unit should be the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself, suggesting that it must be conducive to interpretation without any additional information (p. 132). Codes and categories are then developed from these units as information becomes increasingly refined and synthesized. Each of the coding and categorizing represents higher level conceptualizations of the data. Although

devising categories is largely an intuitive process, they are "informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the constructs made explicit by the participants of the study" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 191; Merriam, p. 133). Developing themes from the categories involves a further process of higher level conceptualization and integration of the data with a realization that it is impossible to include all incidents within the data. An understanding of what is being studied involves a search not only for corroborating incidents, but also a consideration of disconfirming incidents.

In this study, the researcher used a method consistent with Merriam (1988) in which numerous information units were identified in each of the individual transcripts. Each unit was then numbered and coded. Deep thinking and reflection was required on the part of the researcher as the codes were reviewed and considered from a number of different perspectives (Appendix E). As patterns and consistencies emerged from the codes, similar categories were recorded, color coded and then listed together according to color. As the categories were further reduced and refined, several overriding themes emerged. When the themes seemed to be settled upon, the data was searched through for further validation, better pieces of relevant information and more robust support of the findings (Merriam, p. 135). Discussion with the thesis supervisor and other colleagues provided feedback which also assisted in the interpretation of data and validation of themes. Continued reflections and interpretations of the information enabled a picture of the findings as illustrated in the "Model of Hope."

The method of direct interpretation was used to understand information derived from responses to the "Life Experience Information" and from the Workshop (Stake, 1995, p. 74). Transcriptions from video tapes of the Workshop as well as writings from the Workshop and the "Life Experience Information", were read again and again as a means of understanding the individual and her experiences relative to hope. Several attempts were made to analyze these data using codes, categories, and themes since the researcher felt skeptical about first impressions and simple meanings. However, as the meanings of these interactions appeared as corresponding with patterns and themes found in the individual interviews, the coding and categorizing came to be regarded as unnecessarily complex and ultimately redundant in understanding what was being said and written. As in the analysis of the individual interviews, the researcher remained open to disconfirming evidence of a pattern. Information from the Workshop and from the "Life Experience Information" was therefore used to support outcomes from the individual interviews and was subsequently integrated into the individual case study and cross-case study presentations.

Regarding the Herth Hope Scale completed at the Workshop, a strength of this measure was found in its easy access in providing the researcher with an over-all indication of each participant's level of hope. On the other hand, a limitation of this scale was found in the broadness of its items, as for example, in "fear of the future," since the specific meaning of this item for each woman was unclear. Since this measure was one of many sources used in this study to gather

information and not the focal point of the inquiry, deeper probings of the individual items were not considered. A further study could perhaps maximize the use of this measure by reflecting on each of these items.

Whether one is analyzing data in a single case study or across several individual cases, the process is the same. It involves an inductive winnowing of data in which information is sifted through, combined, reduced, and interpreted. As concerns the two types of case studies in this project, namely the instrumental and collective case studies, information gathered from the inquiry was first analyzed from the perspective of the individual participant's case. This was treated as a comprehensive case in itself, thereby helping to give a good understanding of each woman and her experiences relative to hope. In the collective case study, a single case was presented in which a cross-case analysis was carried out to identify corresponding patterns and themes across each of the cases. The step-by-step process of this part of analyzing the data took the following form: 1) analyzing the individual case with the development of codes, categories, and themes; 2) writing of each woman's hope story; 3) analyzing the data across cases with development of codes, categories, and corresponding themes; 4) returning to the individual case study for richer, thicker descriptions of the themes; 5) editing the individual hope stories to show clearer integration and correspondence with the themes; 6) presenting the findings of the research in the form of six individual case studies (i.e. Hope Stories); 7) presenting the findings of the research in the form of a cross-case study.

CREDIBILITY

Credibility is related to rigor in the use of techniques and methods for data gathering and analysis, with attention being given to issues of validity, reliability, and triangulation. Credibility asks a question centering around whether the findings match with reality. The ultimate test is whether readers believe the report and connect to its understanding of the world. The integrity of the researcher and a belief in the philosophical assumptions underlying the qualitative paradigm are key factors in the credibility of a qualitative project (Patton, 1990, p. 469).

In the rigorous use of techniques and methods, integrity in this inquiry is considered as the researcher looks for rival themes and explanations during data analysis. An open and honest assessment of negative instances not consistent with the established themes and patterns lends credibility to the inquiry, since human interaction is seldom perfectly congruent (Patton, 1990, pp. 462-464). As well, individual feedback sessions give each participant opportunity to confirm, disconfirm, add to, or subtract from, the descriptions and understandings of hope in the research findings. New and relevant information subsequently makes the study more explicit and congruent with the participants' understandings and meanings of their hope.

Triangulation methods use multiple sources of data to help describe and confirm the findings (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995). In this study, descriptive information was derived from diverse sources, including the "Life Experience

Information" questionnaire (Appendix A), the Herth Hope Scale (Appendix D), an object representative of hope, and an individual interview. In addition, a Workshop entitled "Exploring Your Hope" (Appendix C) resulted in participants making a collage as to their understandings of hope and responding to questions in written form about their hopefulness. As well, methods of observation, and verbatim transcriptions of the video tapes taken at the Workshop, and the audio-cassette recordings of the interviews, assisted in validating the data and affirming the findings. Other means of triangulation were ongoing throughout the project and involved collaborating with my thesis supervisor and dialoguing with peers. These sources brought differing perspectives to the data and helped to point out personal biases.

Interpretation of data is a subjective experience in qualitative research with predispositions and biases being recognized as avenues for possible distortions in findings (Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990; Stake, 1995). In addressing issues of researcher credibility, the researcher attempted to reduce distortion of the findings related to her presence by meeting with each participant and establishing rapport prior to the Workshop and interviews. This occurred when background information (Appendix A) was gathered and the "Informed Consent Form" (Appendix B) was signed. During the Workshop, the researcher attempted to play a non-directive role in group interactions. Regarding the individual interview, the researcher carefully chose the interviewer and made the decision to be interviewed last. An examination by the interviewer of the researcher's transcript

and respective findings provided useful comments, thereby helping to reduce researcher prejudice and further enhancing credibility of the outcomes. It seemed issues of bias were addressed appropriately when two persons who knew the researcher well were unable to identify her story in the study of individual cases presented in Chapter 4.

Reliability can be found in the ease with which another researcher is able to verify the findings of the inquiry by duplicating its procedures. It was with this in mind that field notes (Appendix H), a personal journal, and an audit trail were kept. This information constitutes a detailed description of how the study was carried out, who was contacted throughout the study, and the rationale for making decisions.

A final issue of credibility is related to the researcher's belief in the qualitative paradigm. This is not to say a faith in the qualitative model excludes a belief in the quantitative paradigm, since both can be used in one study to provide valuable information related to the inquiry. In this study, for instance, the empirical measure of the Herth Hope Scale (Appendix D) was employed along with qualitative data to gain a clearer understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The researcher's knowledge and confidence in the qualitative paradigm chosen for the study enables her to address credibility issues which might arise from use of this model.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND SAFEGUARDS

Research with human participants involves a consideration of the ethical standards required for their safeguarding. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) point out that ethical guidelines in human informants attempt to insure that participants enter research voluntarily, at the same time understanding the nature of the study and the extent of their participation. These standards try to guard against exposure to risks which could outweigh gains that informants might derive from the study.

Adhering to these ethical guidelines, the researcher initially obtained approval for this study from the Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Educational Psychology. Participants for the inquiry were then selected and a meeting arranged with each one to explain the nature and purpose of the study. At that meeting, each woman was requested to sign an "Informed Consent Form" (Appendix B) outlining the data collection procedures and approximate amount of time she would be asked to spend in the study. As well, issues of confidentiality and permission to withdraw at any point throughout the project were discussed. Pertaining to a risk factor, it was indicated that access to a counsellor at Hope House would be given should distress be experienced in the inquiry as a result of the study. Approximately six days prior to the study, a "Summary of the Research Focus and Design" (Appendix F) was mailed by "Next-day-Post" to each of the participants. To ensure anonymity, each woman chose her own code name. As well, video and audio cassette tapes were kept under lock and key and

will be erased at the appropriate time. An "Oath of Confidentiality" (Appendix G) was signed by the one individual who facilitated the Workshop, two persons who participated in the video taping of the Workshop, and one individual who transcribed the tapes. A feedback, follow-up meeting was arranged approximately eight months later following data analysis. This enabled each woman to confirm or disconfirm the findings and make any necessary changes. At this time, each participant was given occasion to express any feelings or thoughts she might have regarding her participation in the study.

DELIMITATIONS

It is recognized that this study of the experience of hope in the lives of midlife reentry women is delimited in several ways. The inquiry is exclusive in its sampling, since its criteria involves women aged 40 to 60 years. As well, further delimitations require each participant to be presently attending the University of Alberta and involved in a minimum of one year full-time studies sometime within the past three years. This study is subsequently restricted to a particular institution and not open to part-time midlife women or men returning to school. Factors related to interest and convenience are the rational for imposing these delimitations.

SUMMARY

This chapter describes the approach taken in responding to the central question of the inquiry, "What is the experience of hope in the lives of midlife women returning to school?" A case study research design has been selected with philosophical underpinnings consistent with those of the qualitative paradigm. Information derived from a variety of data sources evoked rich, thick descriptions of hope. In bringing understanding and meaning to these descriptions, a systematic analysis searching for common themes in the data was employed. Both individual case study analysis and cross-case analysis was carried out. The chapter closes with a discussion centering around the credibility of the inquiry, ethical issues, and delimitations of the study.

CHAPTER 4

STORIES OF HOPE

IN THE LIVES OF SIX MIDLIFE WOMEN RETURNING TO SCHOOL

Case study provides an especially appropriate opportunity for describing individually unique experiences. Consistent with this, each of the following cases is presented as a different story. The researcher relates, in first person, the experiences of hope in the lives of midlife reentry women participating in this inquiry.

In studying these cases, the researcher struggled to present the stories within a structured foremat such that each of the participants' experiences would parallel the other. However, it seemed the unique nature of each woman's experience with hope demanded to be told. The stories appeared to possess a life of their own, defying a common structure, and seeking to be told in ways that were true for those who spoke them. It is in keeping with the desire for this research to be authentic and respectful that the following cases are presented.

It is worth noting the one common feature that does exist in the presentation of these six cases. This feature occurs at the conclusion of each story where a picture of either the hope collage or symbol of hope is illustrated and entitled. This choice was made by the researcher on the basis of which picture was believed would best help in understanding the individual experience of hope in the life of each participant.

MARIKA

It was particularly interesting for me at the Workshop to be in the presence of other women my age and listen to them describe what they thought of as hope. I came away wondering a lot about what hope is for me. As I reflected on this, I was surprised to realize that I equate hope with "knowing I have choices and that I could act on those choices" (1). I had never thought about hope in that way prior to the Workshop, and I don't believe this is something I would have said in my younger days. I recall many years of my life where I felt little freedom to make my own choices and where I spent days indulging in self-pity and ruminating on what was going on for me. Today, I would say choice was there for me, but I wasn't always aware of that then:

> I thought I didn't have choices. I wouldn't say I didn't have them. I didn't, either didn't believe I had them, didn't know I had them, or thought I didn't have them, so it depends on where I was in my life (2).

As I continue to reflect on hope, I picture hope in my mind as a spark that has been ever-present but sometimes close to being extinguished. At those times when I thought hope was gone, it appeared from an unknown inner place. In my first marriage, for instance, I experienced a lot of hope when I left that situation. It was an abusive relationship, and for me, making a different choice and acting upon it involved a great deal of fear. I was often threatened with what would happen to me if I left. I made plans many times to leave, but the day my husband held a gun to me was the day he "crossed the line ... I just said to myself, 'To

hell with it, I'm going to [leave] and see what happens' " (5). Despite the risk of death, humiliation, and poverty, taking control over this situation gave rise to a sense of hope within me. Making the choice to leave was an act of hope for my survival and my son's future:

> ... the only thing that kept me going there was my son. Knowing that if I didn't leave he was going to grow up to be the same kind of person as his father was. And, uh [pause] that was what gave me hope ... in getting out of an abusive situation and not knowing what would happen [when I left] ... it was pretty tough (6,7).

Another major decision I made in my life revolved around my father. He was verbally abusive to me and had lived with me for about six years. I was feeling on the brink of physical, emotional, and spiritual death. What was going on with me became evident in the considerable weight I gained. As time went on, it seemed "all I was doing was hanging on with fingernails." Although I was aware my choice would seriously jeopardize our relationship, my leaving him became a matter of survival for me. After I moved out from his place, he wanted nothing more to do with me and never spoke to me again. He died two years later.

Understanding my past has required a lot of work. My home life was one in which crises seemed continual. I remember as a child experiencing a lot of negativity and feeling I didn't measure up to others. What I said at home seemed to hold little value and I felt I had no ways to influence what was happening to me. To this day, I continue to receive mixed messages from my family about the use of my voice. Coming to recognize what is normal living and gaining self-

acceptance has been a long process of understanding myself and making sense from the chaos. It "has been a long haul back" (9). The steps I have taken to gain a sense of hope for myself can best be described by explaining a mental picture I have of my life:

> I have this picture of how my life is going [pause] I, I go along in life and then I hit this muck puddle, I call it. I call it diddling in my own s--t. I get stopped, and I really get stopped in the mire ... And this is where the choices come in knowing I could step out of my boots [pause] and move forward ... I didn't have to take the boots with me. ... I could step out of the boots and leave them in the muck. And then, uh, getting caught again ... and then again recognizing that I could get out of my pants and still keep moving ... I guess the thing with the flowers is knowing that um it doesn't matter how many mud puddles I get into, I can get myself out of it ... (26).

As the pattern repeats itself and I become increasingly unencumbered by the past, I experience new-found confidence, self-respect, and self-empowerment. Thinking of possibilities to change my life and experiencing what happens when I choose differently gives me hope to continue on.

Subsequently, I envision my hope evolving as I mature. To reach this point in my life I have needed to take a good deal of time alone for reflection and integration of new learnings. I have made time for this by deciding not to work for the past two summers and spending most of that time in the river valley where I have walked and thought a great deal. Since the bush has provided me with a place of safety since childhood, it seems natural that this be the location I would choose to work through these sensitive issues. In the river valley, I have acknowledged my past, my feelings, and allowed myself to grieve. "I go through

phases where I have this incredible sadness ... It's like letting go of [the past] chunks at a time" (29).

Another significant part of hope for me is that of relationship. This involves relating with others and the world. Throughout my life, I have been fortunate that friends have given me emotional and physical support. Their networking on my behalf has helped me survive. With regards to my relating with the world, for as long as I can remember, I have struggled to develop a sense of belonging:

> Because I always believed that there was some kind of mystery [pause] how the world operated, and I'm never going to figure out what the [mysteries] are ... I never had a sense of where I [pause] fit in ... I didn't feel like I could fit in anywhere, or that I was even [pause] that I could even count to fit in somewhere. Like, I would be considered or um [pause] it always amazed me if people noticed me, or if people were interested in me ...

The key to believing I have a place of fit in the world has required a lot of reflection in coming to understand the past. I feel as I control the direction of my life by equipping myself to be productive in society, I will gain a sense of belonging in the world. As well, I am planning to write my life story with the hopes this will provide a feeling of history for my son and other relatives so they too will experience a sense of 'fit' in society.

University reentry for me is about acquiring the skills I need to "be a better teacher" (18). It's also about affirming for myself, "I'm not a dummy" (15). I am wanting to enjoy my work, feel competent, and contribute something worthwhile to society (14):

> University has given me the opportunity to look at things in a different way. It's not just one way [pause] It's not tunnel vision anymore ... It's being able to ... somehow glean some confidence ... to trust [pause] my own ability ... and not be afraid that something is going to happen if I question from five different angles (28).

In this regard, making the collage during the Workshop was an insightful experience for me. I became aware that the most significant part of my desire to travel involves teaching and discovering how different people live in the world. At first, as I reflected on this, thoughts of having to orient myself in a new country at my age were frightening, but later, I perceived of these challenges as "...exciting and adding to my hope" (47).

When I consider an object of mine which represents hope, I think about my spirit bag. A friend made it for me and it holds memories of my accomplishments, meaningful relationships, and acts of kindness shown toward me. Sometimes, when I'm feeling doubtful about myself and hopefulness is at a low point, I meditate on the memories elicited from this bag. I open it up and look inside. Sometimes I write about what is there, and I think about the people involved. "It's my bag of hope because it's a way of saying, 'keep moving forward. Don't stop' " (38). It's my way of building hope for today, and tomorrow, from the past. My spirit bag reminds me of the strong sense of spirit I hold. It is in native spirituality that I experience a feeling of inner balance and being grounded. I believe in a higher power, though I am not comfortable calling this power God. Spirituality for me is about having "... a feeling of freedom

from my fears and ... learn[ing] to trust that positive things will happen for me ..." (49).

I am presently experiencing a great deal of hope in my life. I feel a sense of control over my life and believe I am more realistic in what is happening with me. Since my participation in this study, I am experiencing hope as "very much a positive part of my life and hopelessness has faded. When things don't work out I turn to hope rather than hopelessness" (49).

HOPE COLLAGE

Knowing I Have Choices

SAM

Hope shone brightly for me as I started my new program. For a long time I wanted to work with people in the area of psychology but I went back to school in another field and ended up in a career of my second choice. I didn't always have the hope I could do what I wanted. I lacked confidence to apply for what I was really interested in, but a change seemed to come about for me after my initial reentry experience and the success I experienced from my career. I gained the hope I needed to pursue what was most important for me. I felt secure within myself, worthwhile, and competent. Increasing numbers of people were turning to me with their emotional troubles and how I might help them seemed to fit with my deepest desire:

> ... I just gained confidence in myself and thought I've always wanted to do this. I'm going to apply and if I don't get in, I don't get in. I'll try somewhere else -laughs - Somebody will eventually take me - laughs - And, uh [pause] so I guess [pause] the hope for that probably came from um [pause] in success with uh [pause] my [other career] maybe. And uh [pause] I guess just people [pause] consistently more and more people were turning to me ... it just seemed like that was my job ... So I thought I better be trained -laughs - If I was going to do it well ... I was feeling pretty hopeful like you know, I would, I would [pause] do my degree and I would go out there and I'd work and I'd be probably fairly good at it ... (98b, 99).

In my new career I reflected on my maturity and life experience as a potential asset since I felt my experiences would increase my ability to be empathic. As well, I believed negative life experiences could be viewed as useful ... "that God will make good come out of the bad ... and it's up to us to make that happen" (100). With training, my goal was to help others help themselves.

Then a lot of things took place. My mother became sick and I could see it was changing her personality. As a result, the relationship with my father became more distant and my sisters quit speaking to one another. It was difficult for me to see my family falling apart because "... this had always been a really strong ground for me, that my family was very close" (91). I had a friend I was constantly worried about and seeing him spiral downward and refusing to go for help was hard on me. As well, I was experiencing feelings of the 'empty nest' as my children were leaving home. I was also in the process of divorcing and losing my home. Things which brought me hope have gradually been undermined. Relationships I valued with parents, siblings, friends, and family are changing, and hope is becoming a mere flicker. When my friend committed suicide, it seemed not to exist at all.

My friend's death causes me to question my abilities as mother, friend, and helping person. As a young girl, I was taught I shouldn't hurt other people's feelings. Today, knowing this message to be one of socialization hasn't helped me much in coping with the grief I feel. Jonathan's suicide "hit the heart of me and took a big chunk" (33). It's been a turning point for me. I feel as if his suicide shattered my hope. It's a depth of pain I have not experienced and it pervades every part of my being. Its intensity seems endless. Some friends listen. Some cannot or will not. Others are just *being* there in connection with me when I need them. I feel so vulnerable. Now and then, glimmers of silent, small stirrings of hope appear, but the pull of bleakness draws me in again and

again. It's the closest I have come to feeling hopeless. Most days my life doesn't feel worth living and my existence seems rather pointless:

> So it's always sort of a deliberate digging myself out of that position and, you know, recounting to myself the reasons why it's a good idea to [pause] do something [pause] and for my children and,uh, for myself [pause]. So I'm still not as near hopelessness as [Jonathan] was. [pause] I mean, I guess, maybe at times I'm close ... But, uh, I always do have a lot of people to live for if nothing else (27).

As for work, it helps to numb the pain and provides some salvation for me. I manage to get to school for some classes, but mostly it's my clients who keep me going back. They help fill the emptiness left from my huge loss of hope and give me another reason for existing. I can recognize how hard they are working to make changes in their lives. As I watch them work, I begin to reason, "if they are willing to work, then I am too" (94). When clients can make choices to change under the heavy load of their problems, then I reason 'so can I'. They provide inspiration for me that I am sometimes able to regain a sense of hope for myself. Although my studies are suffering drastically, it is "very, very, important" for me that this not affect my work with clients (95). For me, at this point in my life, a significant part of hope is found in watching clients help themselves and feeling I am creating a time and place where they can make some changes for themselves:

> [Clients] gave me hope. Their resilience that they worked ... And, uh, you know, like, if they were willing to work I sure was too ... So in a sense [pause] they were helping me ... I think that, uh, [pause] as they gain their own insights [pause] they share them with you and they make some profound, um [pause] insight sometimes ... I don't know that it's so much [me] helping other people as creating a space where they can help

> themselves. And I think that, that, watching them help themselves is very, very hopeful (96).

It was at the Workshop I received new insights about what I need to look after myself. It has had a significant impact on the choices I am making. Doing the collage stands out most for me. It was through this medium I recognized the imbalances in my life and became aware of my need to make different choices. Struggling to balance my own needs and all that is happening in my life with the demands of school leaves me short on energy and feeling close to hopelessness. I am gaining an awareness of how important it is for me to care for myself and rebuild a sense of hope for present health and future success. I recognize specific parts missing in my life - things that are of value to me, like sensuous meals, exercise, making a special dessert and putting flowers on the table. I am aware of neglecting not only friends, fun, and relaxation, but missing the time I take in savoring these special moments. As a result of my experience at the Workshop, I'm taking steps to focus less on school and make more time for myself. I believe this will give rise to greater hope within me and eventually lead to more energy and creativity which I'll be able to incorporate into my studies at a later time:

> I think I'll probably bring some of those elements back in before I finish school. I think it's really important. And I think maybe that'll help me [pause] have hope to finish my [pause] project, you know, my thesis and that ... instead of depriving myself of [these elements of hope] all the time ... maybe I'll have more energy to bring to my work if I, if I [pause] don't deprive myself so much ... I think that creativity really runs out ... when you start [pause] being so [pause] dry in your life. That needs some feeding ... Um, when you don't have these things in your life, hope is, is weak or, and then even hope, hope for [pause] for finishing sort of runs out because you don't really have the, uh, [pause] the energy there (8).

I am wanting to live again with a sense of hopefulness. For me, this involves focusing on those elements which give me hope. When I reflect on a time when I experienced the most hope, for example, I think about a recent time with my children and their friends, laughing, talking and bantering back and forth in the kitchen. It was affirming for me at the Workshop when I reflected on what had given me hope in the past and ways I had of building a sense of hope for myself. It validated the value of my keeping hope alive with memories:

> ... my son said he'd video tape the house for me - laughs - ... Yeah, just the different ways that we work at [pause] you know keeping hope or maintaining, maintaining the hope ... you want to hang on to those things in the past that give you the energy to continue into the future (63, 64, 66).

Another of the ways I'm intending to rebuild my sense of hope is by finding a place to live and making it into a home. The collage I made held a lot of symbolism regarding what a home is about for me and I'm hopeful a new home will provide a place for me to put into my life the parts I need. Though there are a lot of emotional and financial risks for me, and I feel vulnerable and fearful sometimes, I'm trying to move on with my life. I'm anticipating being able to implement choices that fit for me, express myself freely, invite friends of my liking, have my own space, and overall, "stretch[ing] out like a cat" (45):

> ... it will be the first time that I will have a place that's mine 'cause I went from my parents home to, uh [pause] rooming with some girls. and then, uh [pause] and then getting married [pause] and [pause] of course you're always compromising with your partner on what, what looks nice and what [pause] and we didn't really agree on very much so we ended up having everything beige! ... I can add purples and blues and so [pause] I'm hoping for lots of colour and lots of, uh [pause] I'd invite my friends over. A lot of greens. So fill it with people (54, 55, 56, 58b).

As well as relationships with family and friends, my relationship with nature forms an integral part of hope for me. I feel a connection with nature. Its life and beauty instills a sense of hope within me. My experiences with nature make up some of the most treasured parts of living in my old home, and closeness to nature will be a key feature in choosing a new place to live:

> I feel like I get some energy when I [pause] am close to [nature]. When you walk on the grass instead of on the concrete. When you lie down on the grass it seems like life comes up into you. Or when you walk by a pool of water ... Just anything where there's like a sunset or a [pause] a, uh, soul, there's a beauty in that and an energy in that that gives hope, gives rise to hope (103).

As a symbol, candles are important for me relative to hope and it is on this basis I brought a candle as representative of my sense of hope. A single candle enables an ordinary occasion to seem special. For me, a candle represents both the physical and supernatural worlds. It's physical in the way there is a kind of space created, as for example in times of intimate fellowship with family and friends. On a different level, creating these times and places of intimacy brings renewal, and for me, this is essential for generating hope. Giving myself away to others, as symbolized by the burning flame, is rejuvenating for me. This too, gives rise to personal renewal and generates the energy I find in hope. At other times, I'm unaware of hope being there at all, but I've discovered that hope can unexpectedly be given in a spiritual way as if a gift from God. For me, hope can best be described as a process:

[Hope] is not a static, uh, thing. You don't get to this place of perfect hope and stay there. It's, uh, [pause] it's a thing that grows and changes. And burns out and is relit, relit, and, uh, [pause] just like a candle. It does wear out and ... So we burn ourselves out and then we start over ... (79) ... Hope is a flame that beckons me forward when moments of despair or fear of change threaten to immobilize me or when I feel empty or alone ... Hope provides me with energy, inspiration, and joy. It sometimes burns clear and strong; at other times it is a mere flicker far on the horizon. But when I think it has disappeared it always returns (writings from 'Life Experience Information').

HOPE COLLAGE

Caring for Myself

VICTORIA

Since spirituality plays the most significant role in my experience of hope, I brought my Bible as portraying something which enhances hope for me. My sense of hope ultimately lies in God. I have a favorite poem which compares my life to a colorfully patterned tapestry. It speaks of God as the weaver; on the back side of the tapestry exits a tangled mass of threads and on the front side, a beautiful picture. A good deal of the back part has been painful for me and I don't fully comprehend it all. I can only understand what has happened in my life by accepting it as a necessary part of God's plan for my life:

> ... I really believe that God is in charge [pause] you know, and that He's, He has a, He has a plan for me, and, and although I'm looking up and sometimes I see all these, what a horrible mess ... you know what the back of tapestry looks like ... And I think, how can anything come from this ... So, yeah, I, I, I always feel like He's, He's always there for me (28).

I think hope has always been present for me even though I haven't always held the spiritual beliefs I now have. It's unusual for me to make the time to sit and reflect upon my life, but now that I am, I feel my life is quite amazing! A lot of possibilities I've dreamed about are becoming reality. Many changes have led me to the road I'm on, and though some might experience utter hopelessness in some of the situations I've been through, I've been able to find a degree of hope and grab onto it. I've always felt life was worth living and there was a future for me somewhere:

> Even in the lowest times, when, when ... it may seem like a hopeless situation ... I wouldn't say it was sort of up there on the hope scale - laughter - for sure, you know, it was sort of down there, but it was never

> at a hopeless situation. I've never felt like life wasn't worth it. Never, you know. ... you still have that little bit of hope in you. You know, you can, you can still cling to something ... (22).

Times of least hope occur for me when I feel helpless. It seems I have only minimal control over my life and I'm unable to influence much of what's happening with me. At these times, there is little sense of having a choice for me. I experienced the profound pain of living this way during parts of my childhood and these events involved my natural mother. I was brought up by foster parents and had formed a close relationship with my foster mother. When I was nine years old, I was forced to leave them and live a drastically different lifestyle with my biological mother. My natural mother was a stranger to me. I remember the humiliation of standing in food lines and the repulsion I felt towards my mother's boyfriend. I was afraid most of the time, and when my sister and I would sing songs at nighttime to comfort ourselves, we were shouted at to "shut up!":

> ...I felt like I was sort of trapped in this home [of my mother's]. Why did I have to be here? Why couldn't I go back? You know, where I was happy? And so, yeah, it wasn't a very, it wasn't a very hopeful time, for me ... so, nobody really cared. It was like, [my sister and I] were just like burdens, and I couldn't understand why my mother had ever wanted us to come back ... So, it was, it was difficult and it wasn't, it wasn't a very happy time ... (11,13).

It was about this same time I was placed in a special class at school:

> ... I [was] in a dummy class when I was a kid, and [the message was] I'd never be able to go to University and I'd never be able to do anything, and I always thought I was so stupid (6).

Life with my mother continued to deteriorate until I quit school at 16 when I was kicked out of home. After that, I finally felt I was able to exert some influence over what was happening in my environment. Six years later I began to upgrade, going on to enroll in secretarial training. My real interest was in nursing, but "... I saw the RNA's, I saw them and I thought, I could never do that, I'm not smart enough" (29). As I worked, I came to feel more and more competent, to the point where I entered the practical nursing program I had originally desired. The experience of succeeding in academics and work gradually built my confidence and culminated in my application and acceptance in a University doctoral program:

> ...I started getting these feelings when I went back [to school] and I became an LPN ... these little thoughts in my head, you know, like, gee, you know, if you can be a nurse, maybe you could be a doctor! And I started feeling like that, and, and, it, for years, I, sort of, you know, just let it boil in my head, and it just got to be [pause] so prominent for me. It's like, I have to do something about this (6b).

Gaining control of my life has been a process. A large part of this has involved facing my insecurities of feeling stupid by returning to school over and over again, as well as by going back to the spirituality I experienced from my foster home. The hurtful, bitter, events of my childhood have been like a train (p. 26) on top of me. For so long I felt incapable of doing what I wanted and unable to be myself. Struggling to rise up from under the trauma of my childhood has been ongoing:

> I went back to school [pause] because I felt [pause] always felt like [pause] a dummy ...and found that [school] was easy! ... So, that was sort of another way to try to get out from under these, this train ... it was a growing process from the time I was 16 until, like I said, I finally found something where I ... I could place my hope. So, even after I was, you know, even after I became a Christian, I was still, you know, I don't know if I can still do this or not because it was still a growing process ... You don't know all the possibilities ... (29).

I experience a lot of hope in the relationships I have with my husband, family, and friends. I hope the loving, open, respectful relationship I have with my grandchildren will continue, and it's on account of the hope I experience with them that my second symbol of hope is their picture. It's my desire to give them the emotional support I lacked as a young person:

> And so my hope for my grandchildren is that they will always feel free [pause] to be with me [pause] for anything ... they can always just know that they're safe here ... No matter what they're going through, I want them to be able to come to me (19).

I met my husband when I was living with my natural mother. He showed he cared for me and this brought some hopefulness to my otherwise miserable situation. The support I receive from my husband is of utmost importance to me, to the point that should we not have agreed about my returning to University, I likely would have remained in what I was doing. Returning to school has lessened the time I spend with family and friends and I regret I've often been too busy to spend the time with them I would like. I feel most comfortable with Christian friends since we hold common beliefs about where our hope lies:

> ...it's good for me to sit with my Christian friends so we can just sit and talk about it, ... And we just really have a good time of getting together, and you feel refreshed after you've talked to these people ... (24).

I was hoping to experience a sense of connection at the Workshop with women in reentry situations similar to mine. There was a lot I would liked to have spoken about, but I felt my spiritual beliefs might offend someone and I didn't want that to happen. I came away disappointed in the Workshop and feeling my hope was experienced in a way that was different for me than from the other women there:

> ...I found that I really [pause] didn't have as much in common with those ladies as I thought I would ... I thought, no, that's not for me, that, you know, I'm not really like that ... it wasn't my experience, and, and so I didn't really feel a kinship with these women as, I thought I would (1).

I would say that I am presently experiencing one of the most hopeful times of my life. I'm attaining goals I set for myself, fulfilling dreams, and envisioning opportunities to make a difference in the world. Hope has become more realistic for me as I've matured. When I was younger, my hopes were "... different, and maybe they're, sort of, out of reach" (10). Now, my future is limited in time, so I'm reflecting on what I might leave behind when I die, as well as thinking about retiring with my husband. It's important for me to be able to look back on my life and feel I've contributed something worthwhile to someone:

> ...with maturity comes this more mature hope ... this is my, my final goal. This is what I'm going to do. I [pause] there's no turning back now ... [pause] ... Let's place all our hope on this one thing, and just do it. ... And I really feel like, now I'm going to [pause] maybe really contribute to the medical world. Somehow. ... I'd like to be able to have people say, I mean, even if it's just a reference to a paper, or a reference to something that I've done, and it's turned the corner for somebody just to do something (10).

HOPE COLLAGE

Finding Sense in the Emotional Chaos of Life

LIANE

It was interesting for me at the Workshop to reflect upon the person I found most hope inspiring. It caused me to think about personal qualities that build hope for me. The person I chose to talk about was a neighboring woman who was there for me after my mother died when I was 13 years old. Her personal characteristics and lifestyle inspired hope for me. She was my mentor. Having been the recipient of these qualities at a time when I needed someone to care, I understand their value in a profound way. The characteristics she exhibited remain important for me today. Our relationship is still active and she continues as an inspiration for me:

> ... she symbolizes hope for me, or a model for hope [pause] I guess that ... she's just always been herself. She's never tried to be anything [pause] that she wasn't, um, and she's just always been so down to earth and so caring. [pause] She's the one that taught me [pause] a great many skills that I needed to learn when I was growing up (18).

When I reflect upon hope and what best represents hope for me, I mainly think of a course I was introduced to when I was watching a T.V. talk show. I decided to pursue what I heard, subsequently involving myself in what the course offered, and entering a new stage of my life. I brought the Workbook from this course as symbolic of the sense of hope this program gave me. With the help of the course, I learned to understand myself and became aware of possibilities for changing what is going on for me. I came to learn about making choices and taking action to effect what's happening to me. Through the course and my

eventual teaching of it, I developed skills which helped control my fears and generate a sense of hopefulness for me:

> The course that I took, um [pause] empowered me. It gave me [pause] a strength and, and a sense of having ways to influence what happens to me. Um, through [pause] my own thinking and through um having developed a different attitude about myself, and having developed communications skills and problem solving skills ... [to] feel confident that I have the abilities ... I need (2).

As I've pondered my participation in this study, I've developed a mental picture of my experience of hope. It consists of two continuums, with hope and fear at either ends of the vertical axis, and sense of control and no control over what's happening to me forming the horizontal axis:

> ... my experience is that the more fearful I am, the less hope I'm experiencing. And, and the, the more that I um [pause] can control the fear, or minimize the fear the more hopeful I become. ...hope is [pause] is the result of my sense of [pause] having [pause] some way of influencing what's going to happen to me. If, if I have no control over what's happening ... that I just feel like I'm being acted upon and I'm vulnerable to whatever is out there, then [pause] it's, it's difficult for me to feel hopeful, whereas, if I can take action to [pause] influence what I sense if happening, then I have a greater sense of hope (2).

Former strategies of coping with what was happening to me proved to be ineffective. I felt confused and suicidal. Losing my mother to suicide when I was 13, and choosing to remain at home with my father and brother, I coped by doing what needed to be done and going "full tilt" with friends, school, school activities and keeping the house. I did what was expected of me ... "I was the strong one" (4). In my 20's, after marriage and children, I burned out, "probably a by-product of ways of coping I'd developed in my teens" (4). I didn't work for

a year. I walked, cried, reflected, took courses in pottery and rug hooking. At a time in my life when it seemed there should be much to look forward to, I struggled with hopelessness and an internal sense of loss of control. The course I committed myself to offered me hope for a new way of living:

> I took this course [pause] and I just [pause] I, I, like I think I can honestly say it saved my life. It gave me a new way to see the world ... to see myself ... new skills for coping ... It [pause] was the most empowering experience I ever had (5).

I've gained confidence in the effectiveness of the skills I learned from the course. Mostly they pertain to assertiveness, communication and problem solving. Internalizing these learnings first required me to make sense from the disorder of my life. Then I could let go of my unhealthy attitudes from the past and develop a different perspective towards the world and myself:

> I learned to be responsible for myself and not responsible for everybody else ... feeling like [pause] I should be perfect and I should [pause] be able to fix everybody, and knowing in reality that I wasn't perfect, and that I couldn't fix everybody. ... it was more, the taking responsibility for myself, an attitude of [pause] that that was my job to take care of myself and, and losing the resentment that nobody else was taking care of me ... that I'm taking responsibility for myself and you take your responsibility for yourself, and that's not my job (6).

The skills I acquired open up new possibilities for me to make different choices. Choosing differently gives rise to changes in myself, my life, and hope for possibility of change in others. Teaching these skills to my daughter, for example, gives me hope she will be enabled to avoid the emotional pain of her mother and grandmother. My role with people becomes more authentic as I

communicate feelings and thoughts with openness and honesty. Relationships are clearer and less confusing for me:

> ... learning to [pause] express my feelings, and express my needs, and [pause] like having voice, I think, which I never allowed myself to have before that um [pause] and all those things [pause] together [pause] gave me a new hope about my life ... Um [pause] that, that now I have a way to go on and I, it doesn't have to be the same as it used to be. Um [pause] I've changed. And ... knowing that I could change so much, gave me a lot of hope for others as well (6).

As a result of a religion class I took in the first years of University, I came to a belief in God. Now, a large part of my hope is spiritual. " ...It's a matter of faith and belief" in some situations where no more control is possible and when taking action won't make a difference (2). This means acceptance of God's control and plan for my life. It means doing all I can and then relinquishing control. The eagle, as my second representation of hope, is symbolic for me in that it represents my sense of control and empowerment on one hand, and my experience of faith on the other hand:

> I look at the eagle and think that eagle has a lot of power in itself, but it trusts. It just trusts that um [pause] the air will support it. Like, it has the ability to fly, but it's trusting in something more than itself, that, that [pause] that it can do and be who it is ... we have a certain amount of control but, but after that [pause] it's being controlled (3).

My spirituality involves a sense of calm and peace for me that I'm being used to carry out God's plan for my life and that of others. "... Whatever has been, has been for a reason ... there's a bigger plan to it, and I just trust that" (20). Each experience increases personal growth and strength. My mother's

suicide, for instance, has formed a large part of who I am and has helped me sort out what I believe is important for me in my life:

> I probably wouldn't be who I am right now if it wasn't for that experience. [pause] So [pause] in that way, my mother's death had a purpose. Like, it had a value. ... I'm sure I wouldn't have [pause] have gone the direction I did, or had the same goals, or whatever, or have helped whatever people that I've helped so far. Um [pause] so, so in that way it gives [pause] her death her life meaning (11b).

Another part of hope for me is about nurturing myself. This requires making time for reflection and drawing on my inner resources. For me, this oftentimes revolves around taking joy in nature by going for hikes, watching the trees, listening to the birds or noticing contrasting colours:

> ... hope is a combination of thinking and feeling, I think. And, if we don't ever take the time to [pause] allow it, [pause] then it doesn't happen ... not consciously thinking, okay, I'm going to be more hopeful after I do this. It's just kind of [pause] being, letting, [pause] everything come together. And be really solid ... not be constantly thinking ... mind get[ting] in touch with heart ... where I'm just sitting and being and that's okay ... and valuing it ... not being so busy ... (15).

I think the most hopeful time of life for me was in my 30's. I would describe my hopefulness then as arising from a balance in being and doing, a sense of myself as well grounded:

> I just felt so totally [pause] strong, at peace [pause]. Like, I was just unflappable, like I just, just felt kind of, sort of at one with the world, just kind of connected to everything um really solid in myself ... still growing and still challenging myself. I felt like, okay, if I die tomorrow, it's okay ... whatever it is that I was put on this earth to do, I've done it now. I don't know what it was -laughs- um [pause] but I've done it ... Fullness. Completeness. Satisfaction (13).

School reentry at this time in my life has a number of different aspects to it. I'm hoping to acquire a more economically equitable relationship with my spouse and wanting to gain academic credibility for work I do. It's also about contributing to the wellness of the world by helping others find their strengths and teaching them the same skills I experience as effective in my life. As well, returning to school involves understanding my relationship with my mother:

> I know what it feels like to feel hopeless ... A part of [returning to school] is being able to do for [my mother] what, what [pause] first of all she couldn't do for herself, and second of all, I couldn't do for her, at that time, but maybe I can [pause] help others, or or help somebody else [pause] from reaching that point [of hopelessness] (11).

At the present time, I feel confident of what has worked for me in the past and believe I have the personal qualities and skills to maintain a sense of hope for myself regardless of whatever might arise for me in my life. When I feel discouraged, I do things that minimize fear and empower me to take action in changing whatever is going on for me. "I feel a sense of hope most of the time even when I don't know where I'm headed or what to do next" (22).

SYMBOL OF HOPE

Trusting

SUZANNE

Nature brings a sense of hope to me. When I was asked to bring something to the interview which has been important for me relative to hope, I thought of a bouquet of flowers. These beautiful yellow daffodils are representative of hope for me. Nature is interconnected with my sense of spirituality and relationship with God, and I find when I'm struggling with feelings of hopelessness, hope can be generated for me when I go back to things of nature. This need not be a complicated process for me, but is most often a simple matter of setting my mind and senses to experiencing what enhances hope for me:

> Whether it's just going for a walk or whether it's just going to Safeway and picking up a bouquet of flowers and [pause] putting them on my kitchen counter and, uh, having them in front of me as I work around the house or whatever I'm doing, just to be able to, to see that the brightness, the beauty, the intricacies, the delicateness [pause] it just, it gives me a tremendous sense of hope for my own life, for the future, and [pause] it also grounds me once again in my faith in God (1).

On a different level, hope for me is pictured as a brightly colored thread that has subtly woven its way throughout my life. Sometimes it feels 'thick and rich', while at other times it has been 'very thin, dead, and blackened,' and I've had to look hard to find it. Yet always there has been enough hope for me to grab onto and climb out of whatever I'm in. When I reflect on it, I'm uncertain whether life would exist for me without any sense of hope, and I think if it were to disappear completely, total death would likely result. Nevertheless, there

seems to be significant value in hopelessness for me since new life and fresh hope seem somehow to spring from those experiences:

> Not that I, I like the hopelessness part of [hope] but I'm not so sure it would be possible to experience hope [pause] if I didn't know about hopelessness. I ... think of the seasons ... winter, summer, spring and fall ... how one unfolds and one is [pause] like fall is sort of kind of a dead time in a sense and yet there is life. And to me [pause] hope and life go together (2).

I experienced the Workshop as insightful and hope inspiring. The most significant part of the Workshop for me was doing the collage. This was a powerful time for me. There seemed to be "electricity in the air" when women were making their collages and when we shared in a circle what each of our collages were about. The collage represented my response to a different part of hope that fit for me on that day. It was the part of hope which "has elements of really having to work hard to keep it" (2). My collage described for me how I try to maintain a sense of hopefulness in my life. I chose pictures which represented my striving to participate fully in life and the determination of will this sometimes requires. They were about hope coming from my heart and soul, and about wondering whether it would make more sense for me to remain in a safe place and not experience the grind that sometimes seems inherent in my hoping:

> Sometimes hope seems step by step, small step by small step ... sometimes fighting against the odds. Swimming, uh, upstream when it seems that downstream would be so much easier ... those strokes, those inch by inch things that, that I might do to help me um [pause] have hope. To help me [pause] build hope again (2, 3).

Life has been a deliberate choice for me. In my first years of University when I was in my 20's, I became suicidal with lack of hope for my future. At that time, I had no sense of God and my despondency revolved around unanswered existential questions of, 'Why am I here? Who put me here? Where do I go when I die?' The emotional pain of this period of my life manifested itself in my becoming anorexic:

> I became absolutely tormented by questions regarding the meaning to my life ... What was the purpose of it all anyway? And, uh, I became anorexic. [pause] My parents really got very concerned about me ... and I didn't know what the matter was. I just knew there was something wrong with me but didn't know what it was ... And I remember standing on the ledge of a window and then I [pause] something pulled me back and I just decided [pause] this wasn't the way to go ... So from, from that point on I, I just decided that I would live (4a).

Although the existential questions remained unanswered for several years, I gave up my need to have full understanding. My choice of life brought more peace of mind than I had known for a long time. My sense of hope increased as I was able to influence what was happening to me by making choices and acting in ways that seemed right for me :

> I got out of the anorexia by, uh, graduating from University. Doing what I wanted to do which was Social Work moving away [pause] I met my husband and I got married. And so my life changed ... and things looked a lot better and I felt better (4b).

It has only been the last few years I've talked much about the anorexia since I didn't understand that time of my life well and felt a lot of shame about it.

Voicing my story of anorexia has turned out to be therapeutic and affirming for me. It has brought a sense of value to that experience:

> It's been a liberating experience for me to be able to talk about [anorexia]. I never [pause] never thought or sensed that there could be a meaning for anyone else in it. And [pause] even though it occurred a long time ago, it does have hope involved in the sense that it's meaningful for other people and it can be hopeful for them. [pause] That they can see [pause] possibilities that there's still hope that [I] got through it. Maybe there's hope for them too (4c).

I silenced my voice in many areas of my life. This led to a lot of frustration, confusion, resentment, and anger. My own needs were frequently not met and I felt pressure to conform to others expectations of me as wife and mother. Oftentimes I felt disempowered and believed there was no way for me to effectively influence what was happening in my life. Relationships for me were all too often clouded and unsatisfactory:

> I, I kept peace around the house. We all tiptoed around my husband to make sure we didn't disturb him [and] inside of me all this time there was a tremendous rage was growing ... it came out I would say in a [pause] really [pause] in a vague kind of depression. And often times there was kind of a sadness. Um [pause] but I really wasn't connecting with my feelings so I didn't really connect all that ... there was a particular incident and I just spoke. I spoke out. I used voice [pause] and I just said this will never be like this again! [pause] Everything that comes along, I don't agree with or that I want dealt with ... I'm going to talk about it! And things totally changed from then on ... my husband ... was actually hurt that I hadn't showed and told him how I'd been feeling all this time. It sure wasn't easy (14).

Building upon past successes of open and honest use of voice brings a sense of authenticity for me. Speaking out allows me to be who I am and opens possibilities for me to influence what is happening with me. Becoming clear on

what is important for me and connecting with the spiritual part of myself helps me overcome fears and gain confidence in using my voice. Though I might not always be able to predict outcomes, I am willing to speak and take action in order to sustain truth and a sense of hopefulness about the situation. Expressing myself leads to awareness of different choices and helps me act in ways that are appropriate for me:

> I think it's pretty hard to have hope if there's no action associated with it. And I think along with the action comes an element of risk. I was thinking of an experience I had not long ago ... it really [pause] shook my hope that I'd had ... I felt ... threatened ... it's taken me quite a while to, to rise up from underneath that ... so I decided I was going to take a big, big risk to try to [pause] to deal with this ... straight on [pause] And so what I did was, um, applied for a job in the area ... where I felt that my abilities had been threatened. [When] I did get the job that really lifted me up and put me on a different plateau ... And in actually doing the work .... again feeling the confidence that I have in my abilities ... [and] seeing some of the results of my work [pause] my hope has been built back up (7).

A strong sense of hope for me is experienced in an over-all sense of balance and congruency. As well as self-understanding, living in this state requires self-care. Mind, body and spirit are all working together "on the same wavelength" and it feels "exhilarating, very strong, a wonderful place to be" (8). To arrive at this hopefulness requires periods of reflection, silence, peace, and solitude. These times can especially be found for me close to nature where I experience rejuvenation and an invigorated sense of hope. The most special place for me is our summer cabin. Here, I spend many summer hours listening to the rustle of the wind through the trees, watching the sun's rays sparkle diamond

droplets off the water and observing rose and amber sunsets sinking behind the horizon of darkly colored spruce. It's a "special time of connection with just the surroundings and nature ... there's a real sense of spirit, nature, God" (8).

School reentry is about building hope for my future. It encompasses a desire to feel my life continues to hold purpose and meaning. Returning to school is about taking action to satisfy some of my needs while at the same time contributing something of value to the good of the world. As a full-time homemaker, and now a student, I'm looking forward to a change in career, in addition to receiving a pay cheque. I envision my maturity as an asset in the work I'm entering, and hope to integrate my life experience with book learning to accomplish what is important for me:

> The main reason I've come back to school is um [pause] it is to bring meaning into my own life ... because I think that I've got 20 to 25 years of really good living life in front of me ... I want to be able to contribute to [pause] to be able to to do things that are meaningful not only for myself but for others ... and so to provide the meaning and challenge I want in my own life ... I felt that I had to go back to school ... So ... coming back to school is all about hope ... in fulfilling the potentials that I believe that I have and that, that I can make [a difference] in my own life and in the lives of others ... I just feel that if my life has meaning and value then everybody else's life does too ... (5, 6).

I feel this is a very hopeful time of my life. There is a sense of congruence for me with respect to connection with God, myself and others. As our children have grown, my relationship with them has become more equalitarian. It's a treasured part of life my husband and I share, and it's important for me not to jeopardize the closeness I experience in family

relationships. School reentry and subsequent work load makes a significant difference in the time I've been able to spend with them. Subsequently, my future plans involve part-time work, flexible hours and sufficient time to satisfy my needs, including the development of relationships which are important for me. The possibility of this happening gives rise to hope and feelings of anticipation for future goodness in my life.

SYMBOL OF HOPE

Relating with nature

PAULA

At the Workshop I discovered how big hope is for me. I learned it encompasses a variety of experiences and I was surprised at the different parts of my hope I uncovered. I especially enjoyed the circle of "beautiful midlife women" sharing about their hope because for me, midlife women have a unique "depth and richness" not found in the lives of younger women. Of all we did in the Workshop, making the collage stands out most for me. It was an experiential as well as insightful task for me. It brought me to an awareness of the hopefulness I feel in motherhood, and led me to recognize my passion for celebrating life as originating from the teachings of my mother and grandmother:

> I let myself go right into the making of the collage ... the rapidity and totality with which being engaged in the work brought me so very clearly to the center of my experience of ample hope in my life. And this, uh, seemingly boundless love of my child, even though he was a boy, seems to have been a huge, huge part of my life ... I think what [also] came out for me [pause] in the making of the collage, and in the experience of making the collage, was [pause] uh that my spiritual roots are really from my mother and my grandmother. That [pause] my mother, especially, because of her own being, because of her own vitality, because of her own energetic, way of living, um, taught me [pause] how to live very sacramentally, and how to celebrate sacramentally (1).

My first recollection of connecting with the spiritual part of myself occurred when I was 3 years old. I remember having a profound experience where I felt interconnected with God and all the universe. There was an incredible sense of my aliveness, and I experienced my life as very special. The impact of this experience never left me and in my older years when I struggled

with feelings of hopelessness, the bottom line for me came down to reflecting on my life as sacred and worthy of living fully:

> I was 3 years old, and I was outside [pause] crouched close to the ground. We didn't have a lawn or anything ... We lived in a little rented house on the edge of town, so it was close enough to hear the wheat fields and the winds, and all this, and I became totally aware of my heartbeat [pause] like hearing, I was so quiet [pause] and of the dark earth, and of the huge, huge blue sky, and it was as if that, there was an old piece of weathered wood on the ground, and I thought, [pause] not consciously like that [pause] very, very still, and pause. there is something beating in me. I'm alive ... I knew that was sacred, but there's no way I had that word in my vocabulary at the time. And that's come back. The heartbeat. The pulse. The passion. All of it is connected (13).

Nature holds a lot of spiritual significance for me and much of what I see, I use to bring understanding to my own experience. "Nature informs my spirituality "(2). I attribute a great deal of the special connection I feel with nature to my roots of being raised on the prairies. Memories of this time remain vividly imprinted within me. I remember, for example, the sense of awe I would feel in the springtime when trees once covered with snow and frost and seeming death gave birth to "tiny, tender leaves" (2). I especially recall my mother's joy as she delighted in the things of nature, and her exclamations of, ... 'look children, look at the windows. See how beautiful the frost is'. Or, 'let's go for a walk, it's the first snow'. Or, 'look, look, children, look at the leaves. ... . She'd say, 'they're transparent. Did you see?' (2)

My sense of grounding also comes from my relationship with nature. This is pictured for me in what I call the humus image. This imagery and what it

signifies for me is particularly strengthening for me when I journey through dark places in my life. Again, this image rises from my childhood. I was the 4th of 11 children, and when I went to the little woods by our house, I somehow felt "the earth did hold me. Hold my interest" and somehow it paid attention to my sensitivities and comforted me (5). Being grounded in the humus image is about personal growth, change, enlightenment, richness and depth of experience for me. The humus image helps give me understanding and a sense of concreteness to what I'm experiencing:

> It's like the humus is that prima material, or that, that primal matter - the stuff that life is made up of, and that I am given to work with, again the ground of my being and my own substance ... that lives in me, out of which I live. And without this grounding [pause] then I'm floating all over the place. Without grounding, to me, there is not hope (19).

I've experienced hope in times of surrender. These times involved places of starkness, and "crucifixion, when I could no longer do anything about anything. Way down at the bottom, I discovered hope" (18). Hope came in surrendering to my destiny and accepting my spiritual journey. 'I will live' was my bottom line and the resolve with which I pursued this was immovable. The profound value of life I held for myself and my son overrode feelings of bleakness and hopelessness, and pulled me through:

> Hope, [pause] I recognize now was in surrendering. Before I decided to leave my husband ... I went through a tremendous surrendering [pause] to my fate. ... I would take care of my child, get up and go to work ... My child and my love for him kept me surfacing. And something in me just said, you've got to keep living. Period. ... And I remember going into a kind of [pause] emptiness [pause] which was a kind of prayer, and saying to whatever force out there, in there, [pause] if I am supposed to live with

> this person till I die, I will [pause] I will live. The bottom line was, I will live. That's surrender ... and to stay with the starkness. [pause] To just stay. [pause] Stay [pause] stay [pause] stay ... It was very clear that I had to leave [pause] my husband or die. And I had said, bottom line, I'm going to live ... So, that I am going to live, supported me through tons of sorrow ... (4, 5).

Returning to University has been a new part of life's journey for me. It provided me with a place of stability and safety at a chaotic time in my life when I was grieving the breakup of my marriage. The first course I took was what I needed to start channeling some of my thoughts, energies, and passions. "I became alive again and was able to tap into an energy within me that had been very much kept in check" (writings from 'Life Information'). I felt security in the building and the people, and safety in the relative smallness of the library and yard. It was a place to reconnect with the cutting edge of academic thought, somewhere to be myself, think critically, and use my voice openly:

> ... [University] started me reading [pause] all kinds of things I needed to read, and debating in my head, and doing presentations. So, [it] was both a container for [pause] that latent spirituality [pause] and it was a container for ideas. And it was a place where I could have a platform [pause] where I could say things. And I was allowed! (10)

I brought the ring I'm wearing as my representation of hope. It holds a great deal of meaning for me through all it symbolizes. It's about paying attention to what fits for me and trusting that inner connection of mind and body. I bought the ring during my first year of full-time reentry. It signifies newness of life for me, another part of my journey, and a time of fresh growth. The color, shape and type of stone carry special meaning for me. Because of the magnitude

of meaning and hope I find in this ring, I experience a profound relationship with it. The stone is amber, oval shaped, made from the resin of trees, and earth colored. The amber, yellowish, sun-colored stone is symbolic of my striving towards growth and what brings life for me. The stone is made from concretized sap which runs through the tree, representing my hope for life as flowing and rich. The egg shaped stone symbolizes fertility in the sense of my life both receiving and giving life. When I look at the ring, "it looks me in the eye, and I look it in the eye." It reminds me of the promise I made to myself to live life fully and so the ring is symbolic of my commitment, as in making an inner marriage vow:

> And I woke up that November morning, and I thought, it's time for a new ring. Today I'm going to find a new ring ... I needed [pause] somehow to find a ring with yellow, or a yellow ring, or a sun ring. The rings I wear, or the earrings I wear, or the clothes I wear, or the bracelets I wear are things I have chosen. Therefore they are mine, therefore [pause] I go about the world, in a sense clothed in my own symbols (12).

The sense of congruency I experience, as in purchasing the amber ring for example, stems in large part from knowing I have choice, "and I think when one feels there is no choice, [pause] then there is no voice, then there is stagnation, then there is no movement, or negative movement which I would call sinking" (12). Then, it's as if I'm stuck, stagnating, and sinking. In the past my voice has been squelched all too often. Working as a teacher, I often felt to hide a lot of my expressiveness behind closed classroom doors. I used to enjoy teaching but the system was sometimes difficult for me to follow. I felt inhibited and unable to

be myself. I yearned to teach using the sensitive, spiritual part of me but this didn't seem to fit well into what was expected of me.

One of the most significant times of hope for me occurred when I was pregnant and knew life was growing within me. I felt a lot of exhilarating emotions during this time. Giving life to another was an "incredibly, incredibly hopeful" time for me. I felt my figure was "gorgeous" and I "wanted to climb on top of a mountain and say, 'Hey! you guys, look at my stomach'!" (15) I loved the experience of feeling life grow inside me. It was a high point in my life:

> I couldn't believe it [pause] when the doctor told me [pause] I was really ecstatic, but I couldn't, I wouldn't believe him. So, I went back and he put this little [pause] device on [pause] my womb and I heard my child's heartbeat. [pause] And, um, I can't express the thrill that that gave me. The joy that that gave me, it really transported me to places of happiness I've never felt. I mean, I had this baby growing in me! And I flew out of that office and it was really, really a hopeful time (15).

However, the pregnancy was followed by a frightfully despairing time. The baby was born by cesarean section and I plunged into a depth of sadness. Up to this point, the pregnancy had been perfect. However, my voice had been silenced along the way by a doctor who had "pooh poohed me [pause] ... and said you don't know anything about your body and I'm not listening to you" (16). As a result, I discounted what I had been previously told, so I was not prepared for the unnatural birth. Without the cesarean section, the baby would have died and so when I knew that, at that moment, I surrendered and said, "just do what you have to do" (18).

I haven't always felt free to share how emotionally painful this experience was for me. Many women don't understand it. It was profoundly confusing for me that new life had tried to birth and couldn't. I felt insulted, humiliated and demeaned by my inability to birth vaginally. I wondered and feared what this meant for me as a woman. Years of therapy and hard work were needed for me to come to an understanding of what this was about for me. I finally came to understand my experience in terms of women having no choice and no voice, of women being forced to participate in life in ways they didn't want to, of women experiencing hopelessness with no way out:

> ... And it's all interconnected and linked with the idea of women [pause] being shut up. Women being put in dark places, and being left there [pause] of women being asked too much. [pause] So, in order to find hope, in a way, it's as if I had to go through back generations of hopelessness, [pause] women having no choice about having babies ...

An integral part of understanding myself centres around accepting my differences. I describe myself as "quite an exuberant person," and sometimes looking "basket casey" (7). Generating a sense of hope requires me to be authentic, so "I go with it" (7). Paying attention to mind and body connection works for me, as does setting time aside for quietness and reflection. These times of solace are energizing for me where I can return to thinking with renewed vigor. Times and places of reflection form a sense of sanctuary for me, and today I insist on maintaining Sundays as days of solace where T.V. and video games do not get played.

I am hoping to make a difference for women, individually and collectively, and hoping this difference will "make its way into the world" (11). In doing this, I am looking for ways to incorporate my spirituality in work and daily life. On my 40th birthday, for instance, I invited a group of friends to celebrate with me in a special ritual I planned. As I continue to reflect upon that time, I receive a great deal of hope for myself in what I am able to do. It was an inspiring time for me. I believe I hold the capacity to mentor and teach women, and to provide unconditional acceptance for every woman who crosses my path. This means giving women a safe place to discover, affirm and enunciate who they are. It means living life fully, with passion, and encouraging other women to do the same. It means taking risks, not always being able to predict outcomes, and holding onto hopes that eventually there will be more choice and a greater sense of hope. My desire is for women to look on my life as a model of hope for themselves:

> I try to live my life in such a way that [pause] shows other women that we have tremendous possibility. We need not be mired in inertia. I understand when women are bogged down and mired in their own swamps [pause] because we've been put there. And we've been kept in there and if we try to bob our heads out of the water, there are times when the big boot comes back and down you go. See if you can breathe under water. Ha, ha, we can! - I think we can (11).

HOPE COLLAGE

Recognizing my Hope

CHAPTER 5

DESCRIPTION OF EMERGING THEMES

This inquiry explores the experiences of hope in the lives of midlife women returning to school. The cross-case study presented in this Chapter focuses on providing descriptions of hope to bring about understandings of this phenomenon as it pertains to the women in this project.

Of the six women who volunteered for this inquiry, four live in Edmonton, while two reside in St. Albert. Ages of the women range from 43 years to 51 years, with a mean age of 46.6 years. All have children. Three women are married, one is divorced, one is in the process of divorce, and one lives in a common-law relationship. Regarding programs of study, three participants are in the process of completing their MEd (Masters of Education) Degrees in Counselling Psychology, while one other is in a BEd (Bachelor of Education) Program. Another woman is finishing her thesis in a MTS (Masters of Theological Studies) program, and one other is in her first year of PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) studies in Biological Sciences. Four participants entered University in 1992, while one reentered in 1991, and another upgraded her high school in 1990 before going into full-time studies at University. As pertains to the Herth Hope Scale, scores of the women on this measure fell within the high hope range, suggesting this as a homogenous group relative to their sense of hope and

reflecting the researcher's suggestions of midlife reentry women as likely possessing a good deal of hope.

In the outcomes from this cross-case study, five themes emerge as common to the participants in their experience of hope These five aspects of hope have to do with relating in the world, connecting with spirituality, acquiring new skills, finding sense in chaos, and making a choice. Every theme carries a unique degree of significance for each woman. This Chapter now turns to a discussion of the emerging themes.

DISCUSSION

Relating in the world

Relating in the world forms a large part of hope for all participants. This encompasses relationships which participants establish with other people, and extends to a sense of each woman experiencing a need to feel she belongs in the world. From this arises a hope of contributing something worthwhile to the good of human kind. As well as relationships involving other people, relating in the world also has to do with inner connections to things of nature. These two elements incorporate a unique balance between the outer world of relating with people and the inner world of experiencing and reflecting upon nature. Whereas one involves the sense of hope that arises with giving and receiving from others, there also exists an inner ability of the women to draw a sense of hope for life as it relates to things of nature.

Relating with others: Participants speak in different ways about the relationships they have with their partners. For some, these relationships are more hope inspiring than for others. Marika, Sam, and Paula reached points in their lives where they left their spouses in order to experience a greater sense of hopefulness for themselves. Victoria, on the other hand, expresses the relationship she has with her husband as holding such importance she would have put her ambitions aside had her husband insisted. She states, "I've invested too many years in this relationship to, to just let it go because of my, the way I'm feeling" (20b). Liane acknowledges the ups and downs of their marital relationship, and finds recognition of past changes gives rise to hope for future changes, "[our] relationship is different now than it was [pause] many years ago, and I guess that gives me lots of hope, too ... that the relationship can [pause] go through changes, and I foresee that it'll be better in the future than it has been and probably calmer" (23). Suzanne talks of the companionship she experiences with her spouse, and writes of her "dreams of frequent short holidays with my husband - maybe 3 or 4 days a month - to visit our children and see new sights."

Each of the women express a good deal of hope with regards to children. For some, this sense of hope is based in the past, while for others, it appears more future oriented. A large part of Marika leaving her abusive marriage centered around her hopes for her son's future. Sam experiences a sense of hope for herself as she ponders memorable moments from previous years, and on this account she plans to take video recordings of her home prior to her move so she

might recall family times. She also talks about her most hopeful time as recently spent in fun and laughter with her children and their friends around the kitchen table. Sometimes, in the bleakest of times, when she is wondering about the value of life, Sam finds motivation for her existence through her children. For Victoria, relationships with grandchildren form significance as she hopes to give them some of the stability, care, and comfort she lacked as a child. The sense of hope Victoria experiences becomes particularly evident as she talks about a picture of her grandchildren she brings to the interview as one of her representations of something she finds important for her relative to hope. Liane speaks about the hopefulness she feels in the teachings she has given her daughter, and the hope this will lead her into a future with less pain than that of her mother and grandmother (21). Hopes for future relationships with children are envisioned as Suzanne talks of the closeness she and her husband experience with their adult children and this brings plans for fun together in traveling and visiting with them. Paula, in making her hope collage at the Workshop, incorporates pictures depicting her son, recalling former soccer games and other such events, relating past attitudes and emotions, and speaking about the strength she feels in their present relationship and the sense of hope this gives her. She gains insight on the influence her mother and grandmother have on her passion for celebrating the hope she feels in living her life.

For most of the participants, friendship also provides another important source of bringing them a sense of hope. Much of Marika's feelings of

hopefulness have come from the support of friends who helped meet her basic needs of food and shelter when she left her abusive situations and had no place to turn. "Thank God for friends!" she exclaims. Sam is in the process of establishing a place of her own where she can "fill her place" with family and friends. Her friends, she says, are those who retain a child-like wonder, "that openness to the possibility that there's still wonder in life" (8). It is a quality of freshness, vulnerability and innocence that Sam observes in children, and one from which she receives an immense sense of hope. The most significant friendships for Victoria involve persons holding a belief system similar to hers. Following the death of her mother, Liane experienced a neighboring woman as one who befriended her. This relationship grew to where the woman became Liane's mentor, with her personal qualities and lifestyle continuing to provide Liane with inspiration for today (10). Paula recalls celebrating her 40th birthday in a special way with a party of friends. She describes this time as "a gathering of energy," and one from which she repeatedly draws a sense of hope as she reflects upon it. Sometimes she, "sits and thinks exactly how the women were placed in the room and the things that they brought ... ! [pause] Amazing! Just amazing!" (11).

Contributing to the wellness of the world appears as a common theme for each of the women. This can best be described as a desire to give something of value to human kind and in this way, make a difference in someone's life and the

world. It is in the hopes of giving from one's life and work that a sense of satisfaction and a feeling of a life well-lived is anticipated.

Marika speaks of the long-standing need she has felt of finding a place of fit for herself in society. She plans to create and record her personal history so it will give her son, nieces and nephews, a sense that they too have a place in the world, "... and that gives me hope, is being able to leave something behind." After reading her transcript, Marika writes, "hope means fitting, and by contributing I am fitting into my world. This is exciting, no longer frightening." A sense of contributing to the good of the world arises for Sam and Victoria when they feel they are doing something productive and worthwhile, whether this occurs in work or in relationships. Victoria talks about her work as hopefully "turning the corner for someone" (10).

Liane, Suzanne, and Paula hope to make a difference in the world by sharing their stories and using their lives as models of hope in helping others become aware of possibilities for change. Liane's desire centers around helping others find their strengths and teaching the same skills she has found to be effective in her life. "...what I want most is to help others ... to support others ... to be able to share [what I've learned] with others ... that it's there for them as well" (10). Suzanne "feels that if my life has meaning and value then everybody else's life does too ... and [imparting that belief to others] is basically what my life is about" (6). Paula believes in her ability to impart a sense of hope to others through living her life as a woman with passion, and by this she means one who

has lived "through the valley of darkness ... the dark night of the soul" (13) Paula is hopeful that, as women grab hold of the possibilities available to them, others will catch the vision for themselves, and the "difference will make its way into the world" (11).

With nature: Each of the participants speak of the value of nature in bringing them a sense of hope. This uniqueness seems to be about sensing, of becoming as fully aware as possible, of nature, as for instance, in Liane watching the squirrels and listening to the birds, Paula scrutinizing "teeny, tiny white flowers" and enjoying the warmth of sunshine, Suzanne observing the changes each season brings, and Sam lying on the grass and "it seems like life comes up into you." For most, the relationship participants find in their relationship to nature is talked in terms of reflection and as stemming from their childhood roots of growing up in the bush or on the prairies. Marika speaks of her many times walking through the river valley as "inspirational," while Sam talks of an "energy" in the beauty of nature giving rise to hope. Part of Victoria's hope lies in her dreams of retiring on a farm with her husband and tending a garden. Liane, Suzanne, and Paula speak of nature as connected to their sense of spirituality. Liane identifies closely with the eagle, stating that the eagle holds a lot of symbolism for her in its strength, freedom, power and trust. For Suzanne and Paula, taking note of changes in the seasons hold special significance for them in understanding times of more and less hope.

Connecting with spirituality

Participants speak of their spirituality as playing an important part in their sense of hope. Although this varies in degree of significance for each woman, there exists a common theme of trust running throughout each description of spirituality. This theme seems to be mostly about trusting in a benevolent power beyond oneself. With the exception of Marika, the women express comfort talking of their beliefs in this higher power in terms of God. For Marika, using the word God denotes traditional religion and formality. This is in contrast to the sense of spirituality she experiences in more informal settings, as when she is involved with native spirituality in "a good sweat" where she feels an "incredible [inner] balance" (37). Spirituality is further described for Marika as she writes about learning to "trust that positive things will happen for me" (49).

Marika's objections to spirituality as formal and religious appear consistent with those perceptions held by the remaining participants. Though the other women are comfortable in acknowledging a higher power in terms of God, they do not consider this terminology to be indicative of their sense of God as formal, distant and far off. A personal trust in this power is acknowledged by each of the participants and a feeling of closeness the women experience with God is noted as important in describing the part spirituality plays in their sense of hope.

Sam experiences God giving hope to her as a "spiritual gift" at times when hope seems to burn out and disappear (87). As for Victoria, the "biggest" part of her hope is located in her spiritual beliefs and it is for this reason she brings her

Bible to the individual interview as a second representation of hope for her. She talks about the turning point in her life coming when she came to know and trust God. "It's not religion!" she states emphatically (3). Liane's sense of spirituality is represented in the eagle, with a picture of an eagle subsequently being brought to the interview as one of her symbols of hope. As the eagle relies on the air and elements other than itself to fly, so Liane talks of her spirituality in terms of trusting in a power beyond herself. She speaks about the peace she experiences in trusting God when she relinquishes control after doing all that is possible. There is a feeling of "shared responsibility" for what is going on in her life, and a sense of confidence she is being used to help carry out God's plan for her life as well as that of others (20). Suzanne finds hope for living and dying through existential questions eventually being satisfied through her spiritual beliefs. She speaks of her sense of spirituality as a vital part of herself and of nature bringing a sense of grounding to her faith in God. The spiritual significance she experiences in nature inspires a sense of hope for her. It is for this reason she brings a bouquet of brightly colored, yellow daffodils to the individual interview as symbolizing her sense of hope (1). Paula also relates her connection with nature to spirituality and speaks of "nature as informing her spirituality." As consistent with Liane's experience, Paula speaks of giving up control when no other possibilities seem to exist for changing a situation. She talks of struggling "at the bottom of hope," and finally reaching a point of surrendering "to my destiny, to my spiritual path

or journey" (18). Paula's hope for her future centers around finding a way of incorporating her spirituality in work and daily life (12).

Acquiring new skills

Learning for tomorrow: Obtaining up-to-date skills constitutes another important part of the experience of hope in the lives of participants. In this particular case, each woman is returning to school as a way of gaining new skills. A sense of hope at this point in her life revolves around learnings which will enable her to experience life in a manner she finds more satisfying. Learning new skills holds the potential of providing participants with concrete ways of enriching their lives. They speak about University reentry as broadening their world views and giving a fresh awareness of possibilities for self and others. For each woman, there is a good deal of hope for her future tied up in her present acquisition of new skills. University reentry presents novel opportunities for both Marika and Victoria to equip themselves to feel more competent and productive in society in ways which are meaningful for them. Marika is in the process of "... learning to be a better teacher" (18). Whereas she has been discouraged in her past from developing her own mind, she notes University as giving her "the opportunity to look at things in a different way ... it's not tunnel vision anymore ... It's being able to ... somehow glean some confidence ... to trust [pause] my own ability to ... question from five different angles" (28). Initially, Sam lacked confidence to apply for the program she wished for, so she returned to University and entered a

career of her second choice. The success she encountered in this experience led her to successfully reenter a program that was her foremost dream. At present, Sam gleans much of her hope by learning from her clients and watching them acquire new skills to influence what is happening to them. The loss of significant elements in Sam's life slows the acquisition of skills she needs to complete her degree and work in a job she feels hopeful is right for her. As she introduces elements back into her life which are needful for her at this time, she anticipates renewal in her sense of hope and energy to continue with her academic program. Victoria states, "I felt hopeless when I was working as a nurse because I had, I didn't have the knowledge and I couldn't help the people. But now, I don't feel hopeless." For Victoria, acquiring new skills in medical research is linked to her hopes of making a difference in the medical world, of "knowing my work has turned the corner for somebody just to do something" (10).

A turning point for Liane came several years ago from a course she took which taught her new skills in thinking, communicating and problem solving. These learnings opened her awareness of possibilities for change and gave rise to a sense of empowerment. So impactful were the skills she attained that Liane brought her workbook to the interview as a second object important for her relative to hope. A further example of the impact of learning on Liane's sense of hope occurred in her first year of University when she came to a belief in God through a religion class. Liane speaks about her present feelings of hopefulness at University as centering mostly around gaining academic credibility for the work

she likes to do with people, and her desire of becoming economically independent (10).

Suzanne writes about her hopes of having " ... 20 to 25 years of really good living life in front of me" and talks about " ... my return to school as a means to fulfilling an end that is really important for me"(5). As a full-time homemaker and one who engaged in a lot of volunteer work, she looks forward to a career change and anticipates the feelings she will experience when she receives a paycheque. She expresses hopes that new learnings will enable her to work in ways which will add further meaning to her life. Paula describes her present acquisition of new skills as about her "huge desire" to live as fully as possible. She talks about her first year of full-time reentry as beginning a new part of her life's journey. University has taught Paula to think critically and provides her with a place where she can unleash energies not formerly allowed. Paula's sense of hope for her future lies in gaining the skills she needs to give women a place to discover and affirm who they are (11).

Making room today: Every participant speaks about the personal flexibility and change in lifestyle that taking time for these learnings has required. The willingness of everyone to meet the demands of reentry points to the significance each attaches to her sense of hope in acquiring new skills. Marika comments on the comfort of small things, a warm bed for example, and the monotony of eating "chicken, chicken and more chicken." Sam hears her hopes of reentry challenged and sees "floors unvacuumed, laundry piled up, books and

papers high on all available surfaces." She recalls "golden grilled cheese sandwiches prepared by my son looking like a gourmet feast." One of Victoria's more noticeable differences is her "putting on 50 pounds so far" and "feeling very old sometimes." She comments on the putrid odors of her lab work. Suzanne writes, "no longer are there the regular, organized meals of before." She "looks for older students to connect with" and recollects the "steamy pizza and coffee smells of the cafeteria." Paula sees "the world magnified" and compares her new growth to humus in-the-making on the forest floor.

Finding sense in chaos

Recognizing hope: Each participant believes a sense of hope has always been present in her life. Though everyone talks of feelings and experiences of hopelessness, there is recognition that a sense of hope, though at times seemingly nonexistent, in retrospect, has always been there for them. Everyone speaks of coming to a sense of hope as often involving a struggle and requiring a tenaciousness that does not give up easily. Marika pictures hope as a spark that has sometimes come close to being extinguished. She speaks about hope as rising from an unknown inner place in the midst of hopelessness, reasoning a sense of hope as being there for her " ...'cause I kept going. I kept going" (25). Sam talks about hope in terms of a burning flame, and as a process involving change, growth, burning out, being rekindled and never perfected. For Victoria, hope is personified for her through her beliefs in Jesus. A sense of hope for Liane is

pictured on a graph with greater hope being experienced in correlation with less fear and more control. Suzanne describes hope as a brightly colored thread weaving itself through her life, sometimes feeling "thick and rich" and other times feeling "very thin." She reasons, "If hope were to have disappeared completely for me, I think death would have been the result" (3). Paula describes her sense of hope as sacred, possessing a spiritual quality, and experienced as a celebration. For her, the process of hoping requires energy and vitality, and means commitment to personal growth (1). The immensity of her hopefulness was a special insight for Paula at the Workshop.

Encountering fear: There is consistent reference to the influence of fear on the sense of hope experienced by the participants. For many, the element of fear appears to lie at the root of feeling hopeless, and overcoming fear becomes a large part in experiencing a sense of hope. On the Herth Hope Scale, the lowest scoring response pertained to the item "fear of the future," suggesting this factor threatens the usually high level of hope experienced by women in this study.

Of particular note is Liane's description of the role fear plays in her life. This is pictured graphically for her as she mentally envisions her hope as located between two continuums. Faith and fear sit on either ends of the vertical axis with control and no control situated at opposite ends of the continuum on the horizontal axis. There is less hope with more fear, and the more often fear can be controlled or minimized, the greater the sense of hope.

To a large extent, Liane's description fits with the experience of each of the participants. It is in overcoming the fear they become sufficiently empowered to exert influence over their own lives. For Marika, fear becomes both an inhibiting and motivating factor as she remains in abusive relationships out of fear, yet reaches a turning point and leaves when she fears for the safety of herself and her son. In many ways, Sam feels her life is out of control. She experiences fear in her feelings of anxiety and vulnerability since many of those things which formerly gave her a sense of hope are gradually being undermined. Victoria relates incidents of being "scared" as a child when she was forced to live with her natural mother who was a "total stranger" to her. When she was "thrown out like yesterday's garbage" at 16, she finally felt she was "out from under her mother's thumb" and able to control her own life. Suzanne speaks about the confusion and self-doubt she experiences with feelings of fear, citing an incident not long ago when she confronted her fears by successfully applying for a job (7). Paula talks about the tremendous impact childbirth had for her. She relates the inexplicable joy of her pregnancy, then plunging to the depths of knowing "something was terribly wrong" as she gave birth, and how she "surrendered" to whatever had to be done to save the baby's life. Feeling confused and out of control, this experience haunted her for many years (18).

Understanding the past: For several women, reflecting on their pasts evokes vivid memories and emotional responses. It becomes clear a great deal of pain has been experienced in the lives of most participants. As they share about

their places of feeling hopeless, it seems evident that none would wish to return to this time of their lives. Nevertheless, for most, the need to reflect upon these times as a way of understanding the past and working through personal issues forms a significant part of their experiencing a sense of hope. Finding sense in emotional chaos enables a sense of well-being and hopefulness.

For Marika, recognizing the pattern of her past 'stuckness' demands a good deal of personal work. Much of her awareness occurs parallel to her University experience when personal issues are triggered as her thinking is broadened and she becomes more aware of possibilities available to her. Now, since reflecting on her sense of hope from this study, Marika writes, "Hope is very much a positive part of my life and hopelessness has faded. When things don't work out I turn to hope rather than hopelessness" (49).

Sam finds herself in the process of grieving with her children leaving "the nest", the loss of her home, an impending divorce, and recently the suicide of her friend. She writes about her struggle with shattered hope as "depth - pervasiveness - intensity of pain - endlessness." She speaks of processing the pain and the need to be authentic and honest about where the pain is coming from. "... you got to be real ... and feelings are feelings ... (108) hope comes out of feeling all of it [pause] and living through it ..."(104).

It is unusual, Victoria says, for her to sit and talk about herself (32). It is mostly through the collage that Victoria speaks about her growing up years as feeling she was "tied down ... a train on top of her ... unable to move" (29). She

then speaks about the long process of learning to be herself and her recovery from childhood experiences. Coming to an understanding of her past involves an acceptance of all parts of her life as God's plan. Although there is sometimes confusion for her over how God could allow a child the trauma she experienced, Victoria believes there must be a higher purpose than she can fully comprehend at this time. Liane, shortly after her marriage, reached a point of feeling burned out and suicidal. Through working out issues related to her mother's suicide and with the help of a course, Liane gained a sense of empowerment for her life and a new sense of hope. Letting go of angers, hurts, resentments and perfectionism gave room for fresh attitudes and behaviors.

Suzanne believes it would probably be impossible for her to know much about hope had she not experienced feelings of hopelessness. She speaks about her experiences with "vague depressions", anorexia, and rage, reflecting on her tendency to deny and minimize what goes on with her. As she increasingly gets in touch with her feelings, Suzanne is coming to acknowledge the impact personal issues have on her life and sense of hope.

Paula has come to view her past experiences of hopelessness as issues symbolic of women feeling trapped, of being forced to participate in things they do not want, and of their inability to be authentic. Paula understands herself in terms of her womanhood and passion for life. She speaks of being "quite an exuberant person" and of following what seems right for her, "as silly as I might look, or ... basket casey as I might look ... I just [go] with it. And I've done

that a number of times in my life, and it has always worked ... "(7). It is in accepting her difference and understanding what that process has been about for her that Paula desires to instill a sense of hope in other women for their uniqueness.

Caring for self: Each of the women talk about times when previous coping methods have been ineffective and left them feeling out of control and without much sense of hope. For most, this involved ways of numbing their feelings by keeping busy and doing what was required of them. There came a point when these ways of dealing with life situations were recognized as maintaining an inauthentic, mechanistic type of existence. Each woman aspired for a greater sense of empowerment over her life with greater hope for her future and daily living.

For every woman, coming into a sense of hope for her life involves a personal awareness of what is important for her. It involves reflecting, paying attention to her needs, and becoming aware of ways that maintain her sense of hope. For most, this involves times of aloneness for contemplation.

Marika talks about recovering a sense of hope as being "a long haul ... one step at a time"(9). Building a sense of hope for her is largely connected to her return to those things where she has felt a sense of safety and well-being since childhood. She spends much time in the river valley where she walks, thinks, cries and observes nature. As symbolic of what she experiences as important for her relative to hope, Marika brings her brightly colored, beaded, Spirit Bag to the

interview. This "bag of hope" contains representations of past accomplishments, relationships, and acts of kindness. It provides Marika with a source of encouragement as she meditates on what the bag contains, writes about her memories, and thinks about the people involved. Sometimes, she says, recalling memories of the contents of the bag is all that is required to build a sense of hope for her (39).

For Sam, a significant insight occurs at the Workshop as she recognizes her struggle with hopelessness and then comes to an awareness of what might be helpful in building a sense of hope for herself. Recognizing a need to care for herself, Sam concludes she is no longer willing to deprive herself "all the time" and the emotional dryness she is experiencing "needs to be fed" (8). As a way of rejuvenating her sense of hope, she plans to put into her life many of the qualities she finds hopeful for herself. Sam recognizes the importance there is for her in times of closeness with friends and family, as well in times of "... not doing anything, relaxing, and savoring that relaxation" (5). A candle, as her representation of hope, signifies special times and the personal renewal and energizing she experiences during these occasions. The flame also symbolizes Sam's giving of herself and the life she feels flow back into her as she gives to others.

Victoria describes her life as a tapestry with God as the weaver. For her, God is in charge of her life, relieving anxieties, bringing comfort and companionship, and providing consistency (16). "I really feel like a peace come

over me ... So, even in the midst of feeling depressed or feeling that things are just not going the way they should, or whatever ... I pray about it and place my hope there, and say, it's not on my shoulders anymore. You know, it's on God's shoulders" (5). Although Victoria is uncertain about the inner changes that have gone on for her, she knows there has been a difference since she feels better about herself and her husband has noticed she smiles now. " ... I think I was just a very angry person, for some reason, I don't know why. Maybe I just thought, [pause] I don't know [pause] because of my upbringing, -laughs- or whatever, that I was angry. I didn't know that I was that bad" (27).

Liane experiences a sense of 'this is right for me' as she continues to build coping strategies into her life (8). In addition, she talks about an inner feeling of peace and the sense of hope that arises for her as she takes time to nurture herself. This requires periods of reflection, experiencing nature, and accepting God's plan for her life. There comes a sense of congruency for Liane, of <u>being</u>, rather than <u>doing</u>, where her mind and body come together at rest (15). "There is just great joy in [pause] just sitting in my backyard and on my chair and [pause] just watching ... watching the sky and watching the trees, and listening to the birds and watching the squirrel run along the fence, and noticing the contrasting colours, and [pause] and the sounds and [pause] like, it's just being part of that and being connected. And valuing it. Not being so busy ..." (15).

Suzanne also experiences hope in times of reflection, and particularly finds herself regenerated at the family cabin in summertime. Being close to nature at

this place ignites an almost invincible sense of mind, body, and spirit congruency for her. "... hope is [pause] is in full bloom ... there is a real sense of connection with oneness [pause] with myself, the world and God. That they're all working together. We're all on the same wavelength. Yeah. [pause] And that's exhilarating. That's [pause] a wonderful place to be ... it is very strong and a very [pause] very [pause] very strong sense of [pause] confidence in all of those things" (8).

Paula pays particular attention to mind/body connection, trusting that inner connection, and "... insisting on being who I am" (14). She journals as a way of working through personal issues and often uses her relationship with nature to help interpret what is going on with her. Paula speaks of the importance for herself of being grounded. In describing this, she talks about the image of humus, bringing to life her understanding of personal growth and enlightenment using the illustration of "sap - rich and flowing, roots digging in, and leaves reaching up to sunlight" (1).

Making a choice

Another part of the experience of hope for each woman centers around having a choice. A sense of hope arises for participants as they become aware of possibilities to influence what is happening to them and then act on the choices that best fit for them. For these women, adopting a hopeful attitude forms part of their choice making. Feeling successful in making past choices has helped to give

hope for new decisions and given confidence to risk disappointment. Use of voice also emerges as an important factor in enabling participants to choose differently.

Adopting an attitude: Choosing to adopt a hopeful attitude is particularly evident in the actions of these midlife women as they make choices to return to school and attain goals they have set for themselves. In accepting their midlife stage of life, there is a sense of realism associated with their feelings of hope as they look toward their futures. Marika speaks about this as being the most hopeful time of her life. She feels challenged and motivated by her maturity (48). After some thoughtful reflection, she talks about her hopes of working internationally and the prospect of orienting herself in a new country as " ... exciting and add[ing] to my hope." Marika's sense of hope is evolving as she matures. She feels more content with herself, her life, and her future. Victoria speaks about her sense of hope as a "more mature hope" since she believes it is more solidly based than when she was younger. Her thoughts often focus on leaving behind a legacy of doing something worthwhile in someone's life (10). "I wouldn't like to see that at the end of my life that I haven't even done anything, really". Sam, Liane, and Suzanne consider their life experience to be an asset in the counselling careers they are entering. Sam talks most about the value of this when she expresses her beliefs in life experience as enabling her to be more empathic and understanding of another's pain (100). Paula also hopes to relate with others using her experience as she affirms women using rituals and symbols and encourages each to seek her authenticity.

Choosing to act: A new insight occurs for Marika at the Workshop when she equates a sense of hope for herself with knowing she has choices and recognizing she can act on those choices (1). There is an increasing awareness of hope as action oriented as she reflects on past situations and senses her ability to take more control over what is happening in her life. Marika gains further insight on choosing differently when she talks about moving on in her life, of feeling more empowered and confident as she casts off the role of "being a victim ... and ... bemoaning her fate" (24). In the Workshop, Marika draws a picture depicting her recognition of what making choices is about for her. She talks about recognizing a pattern of "... hitting this muck puddle, I call it ... I get stopped in the mire ... and this is where the choices come in knowing I could step out ... and move forward ... and not have to take the [past] with me" (26).

Sam speaks about a sense of hope for herself as about making choices based on what is important for her at this time in her life. Since the recent death of her friend and the loss of other significant relationships, Sam recognizes her need to bring elements back into her life which she finds meaningful and hope inspiring. One of the first steps she makes in this direction involves a choice to put off her thesis and take time for herself. Another course of action Sam plans to take is about choosing healthy relationships, and revolves around spending time with friends who have a way of helping her feel good about herself.

Victoria talks mostly about her choices related to returning to church and school. Several years ago she responded to an inner urge to return to church.

When she followed through on that decision, she experienced a sense of feeling this was right for her. "I just felt, in my heart, that it was about time I started going back to church. And I didn't go back, -snaps fingers- you know, like, this right away [pause] I'd think about it ... And eventually I went [pause] and then I felt, this is where I belong. This is, this is good" (18).

For Liane, a large part of making different choices centers around an awareness of possibilities for change. The skills she gained through a course she chose to become involved in shows her specific ways to recognize alternative courses of action and to choose what best fits for her in that situation. As Liane adopted different perceptions of the world and herself, she developed capabilities to make healthy decisions and act upon them. "... I took this course [pause] and I ... think I can honestly say it saved my life ... it [pause] was the most empowering experience I ever had" (5). A sense of hope arises for Liane as she takes action to influence what is happening to her (2). She writes, "I think this next stage [of my life] will be one of "doing" and "action ..." (22).

Suzanne considers her life as a choice to live. She talks about this choice being made several years ago when she was standing on the ledge of a window and contemplating suicide. Since that time, Suzanne has found a sense of hope in the meaning and value she chooses to derive from her life. She sustains this hopefulness by exploring various possibilities and deciding to act in ways she feels are right for her. She says, "I think it's pretty hard ... to have hope if there's no action associated with it" (7a). In speaking about the sense of hope she has

regarding her choice to return to school, she reasons, " ... I feel healthy. I feel alert. I want to be active. I want to be able to contribute to [pause] to be able to do things that are meaningful not only for myself but for others ... There's all sorts of things I could have done ... but to me they don't have the element of meaningfulness and challenge that are important for me" (5).

Similar to Suzanne, Paula also made a conscious choice to live. This occurred in her marital relationship when Paula chose to leave. She states, "It was very clear that I had to leave [pause] my husband or die. And I had said, bottom line, 'I'm going to live' ... and I wanted my life!" (5,10). Though Paula talks about the sorrow of separation, becoming a single parent, and the "sheer determination to live" (5), choosing what she knew to be most hopeful was about taking a standing for her future. It was a decision that prompted her return to school. Paula's representation of what is important for her relative to hope is a ring she wears. Although this holds much meaning for her regarding her connection with nature, it is mostly symbolic of her inner vow to continue with living her life fully. In this way, it represents the choices she consistently makes in being commited to her purpose.

Taking a risk: Another common element influencing the ability of each woman to act on choice centers around her willingness to take risks. Outcomes to making different choices are spoken about as often unpredictable and specifically unknown. Regarding reentry experiences, for instance, each woman talks about her feelings of unfamiliarity in returning to school and the risks of failure she

consistently encounters, whether this be in seminar presentations, evaluations, handing in papers, writing exams, or in relationships. In spite of this, the strength in each participant's sense of hope propels her forward and she continues on.

When Marika eventually left her abusive relationships, she risked humiliation, poverty, and further abuse since she was uncertain what would happen to her. As she struggled to exist emotionally, physically, and financially, she describes herself as in "bad shape", living with friends out of suitcases, and unemployed (10). Taking the risk of choosing differently has led Marika to a sense of hope but this has sometimes been "pretty tough" for her (7). At present, Marika risks again as she applies for the graduate program.

Sam, with her recent separation, encounters mixed feelings regarding her move from familiar surroundings. On the one hand she experiences a hopefulness in changes for her life, yet on the other, she experiences a shaky sense of personal grounding and feels insecure with no home. She misses her children and their friends and worries about finances. During the interview, recalling memories of her most hopeful times heightens her feelings of insecurity and this becomes overwhelming for her (52). Overall, a great number of risks are involved for Sam at this point in her life. She talks of her determination to work through the pain of her losses and her participation in this study as being important for her in enhancing a sense of hope.

In school, despite the discouraging experiences in her elementary years where she felt "stupid," Victoria repeatedly risked academic failure. After quitting school at 16, she completed grade 10 six years later and went into secretarial training, then went on to complete schooling as a licensed practical nurse, followed by acceptance in a University Science degree program where she is currently completing a PhD program. Victoria chooses to empower herself and lift the weight of her past by continuing to risk "looking the fool" as she educates herself . "I went back to school [pause] because I felt [pause] always felt like [pause] a dummy chicken, you know ... and [I] found that it was easy ... then I still felt, well, my hands are still tied because I still don't know enough. I still can't do enough" (29).

Liane speaks about the possibility of being misunderstood and ridiculed in her return to school and mentions a risk of separation from her husband as she works through marital issues. Her major focus, however, centers more on feelings of competency she has developed in coping with her life. She writes, "I feel hopeful most of the time now even when I don't know where I'm headed or what to do next" (22).

For Suzanne, a sense of hope sometimes involves risking uncertain outcomes, feelings of incompetence and self-doubt. Subsequently, there are times of hesitation for her in coming to a new choice and acting upon it. Recognizing the overriding importance of what is important for her eventually leads her to taking the risk. In relating a recent incident where she felt her capabilities had

been threatened, Suzanne talks about the risk of "having my hope threatened even more" and how, when she successfully risked, "... that really lifted me up and put me on a different plateau ... one that I needed [pause] close to where I'd been before" (7b).

The emotional consequences for Paula concerning her choice to leave the marriage were painful as she struggled with the sorrow of a broken relationship, becoming a single parent, and feeling responsible for splitting the family. There were no illusions of heroism nor new found energies for Paula as she risked making a new life for herself. It was more a feeling of digging in and laboring that involved a dogged resolve to stick to her bottom line. Paula continues to feel it was the choice that fit best for her. Reflecting upon her decision, she comments, "... as it stands now, we both have our life, and our child has his, too!" (10).

Using voice: Making choices to use voice emerges as a strong factor in giving rise to a sense of hope for each woman. They also speak of significant times when their voices have been silenced and how their choice to express themselves leads to change in their situation.

Marika received messages at home to silence her voice, question nothing, and comply with authority (29). There was a significant impact recently when her mother started calling her names and Marika spoke out. "When I confronted my mom, what I, what I, saw in my own mind ... It was like somebody just threw the door open from age, whatever, childhood, [pause] to now ... open in my mind

and said, well, here, this is ... how [pause] you got to be who you are" (20). As Marika comes to fuller understandings of herself and gains courage to use her voice, she develops a new system of beliefs about herself and the world.

When Sam was growing up, she relates her experiences as a female and the "very real social pressure" that was brought to bear upon her with the message, "don't hurt other people's feelings." Sam believes this has meant a sacrifice of her feelings and a silencing of her voice for the sake of others (38). In her new home, she feels hopeful about the freedom she will have in expressing herself. For her, this involves decorating "with lots of color," having people around she values, entertaining family and friends, laughing, stretching out, relaxing, and "a little self-indulgence raspberries and cream."

Victoria is concerned with her use of voice. As a child, she remembers lying on her bed upstairs and singing with her sister to help cope with the confusion of their lives. Then being screamed at by their mother, " 'Shut up you girls! Just shut up! Don't sing anymore!' You know, and we thought, oh, what, what are we in for, you know" (16). There were a number of years where Victoria continued to experience a lack of choice and silencing of her voice. Today, Victoria talks about being most comfortable using her voice when she is with those who hold beliefs similar to hers. During the individual interview, she talks about holding her voice back at the Workshop since a lot of what she wanted to say revolved around her spirituality and she did not wish to offend anyone with her opinions.

For Liane, honest expression of feelings and needs brings more clarity in relationships and leads to hope for the future. As she experiences the difference using her voice makes in her life, she is encouraged to hope for change in others. "So, it was more ... learning to [pause] express my feelings, and express my needs, and [pause] like having voice, I think, which I never allowed myself to have before ... gave me a new hope about my life ... that I could change so much [pause] gave me a lot hope for others as well" (6).

For Suzanne, more difficult choices often involve using her voice and this is not always easy for her. She says becoming clear in what is important for her and connecting with the spiritual part of herself leads to greater confidence and more effective use of her voice. Suzanne believes use of voice has an important part to play in making choices. "I can decide when I want to use voice [pause] when it is good for me ... I've got control over that and I can use it ... I've got choice. And [pause] hope and choice, they do really go together" (14). Open expression of herself helps give Suzanne a sense of authenticity with self and others, and at one point, brought significant emotional healing to her marital relationship.

A large part of Paula's passion for life centers around her freedom of expression in using voice. In the past, voice was often "squished in" for Paula (7). The Workshop provided a place for her to talk openly and honestly. "It is hopeful to be able to say my truth, to be able to say, this is what I'm about. To me, that's part of hope, too, to be able to say who I am. Just me. Not more.

Not less ..." (3). In her former job as a teacher, Paula felt the need to hide her expressiveness. In contrast, she experiences University as allowing freedom of expression and bringing a sense of hope for living life fully in ways which are congruent for her.

SUMMARY

This study describes the experience of hope in the lives of six midlife women who recently returned to full-time studies at University. Each of these women talk freely of her life experiences, expressing emotions that range from depths of pain in times of least hope, to heights of joy in times of most hope.

Participants speak of how a sense of hope is maintained for them through their relationships with others and how the life of nature somehow imparts to them a feeling of hopefulness. For some, their relating with nature speaks of God and directs them toward spirituality. For everyone, a sense of spirituality is about trusting in a benevolent power beyond self. This in turn leads each one to a personal sense of hope.

It is in rational planning for the future that every participant engages in the process of acquiring new skills. The experience of reentry revolves mostly around the hopes of each participant to live her life in ways which are important for each her. Flexibility is required for her to flow with the changes in lifestyle required to balance these dreams with the realities of everyday living.

For the women in this inquiry, making sense from the emotional chaos of their lives is a significant factor in their experience of hope. This involves struggling to come to understandings of their pasts. Encounters with fear have lead participants to feelings of being stuck and of life being out of control, yet in retrospect, each woman recognizes hope as always being there for her. For every participant, generating a sense of hopefulness requires reflection and self-awareness. For most, this involves quiet times and paying attention to mind/body connections.

Making a choice to influence what is happening emerges as the final theme in the experience of hope for these women. Part of this centers around adopting a hopeful attitude and choosing to act on possibilities for change in their lives. Making choices involves a willingness to risk, since the outcomes to decisions are not always predictable. Hope for choice comes about through women using their voices. Expression of needs and wants becomes an important factor in exerting influence over what is taking place in the lives of each woman.

This study indicates that midlife reentry women experience a sense of hope for themselves. Outcomes from this project show that hope for these women is an interactive process which can be described and understood in terms of relating in the world, connecting with spirituality, acquiring new skills, finding sense in emotional chaos, and having a choice. Enhancing a sense of hope for women in this project is subsequently revealed as focusing on these five areas of her life.

MODEL OF HOPE

The following "Model of Hope" has been developed from this inquiry to describe the experience of hope in the lives of midlife women returning to school. The centre part of the model indicates little hope, with movement toward the outer edges reflective of a growing sense of hopefulness regarding that particular aspect of a participant's life. The 3-dimensional form of the Model has been used to portray the multi-dimensional, interactive and overlapping areas of hope found in this research to constitute the hoping process for midlife reentry women.

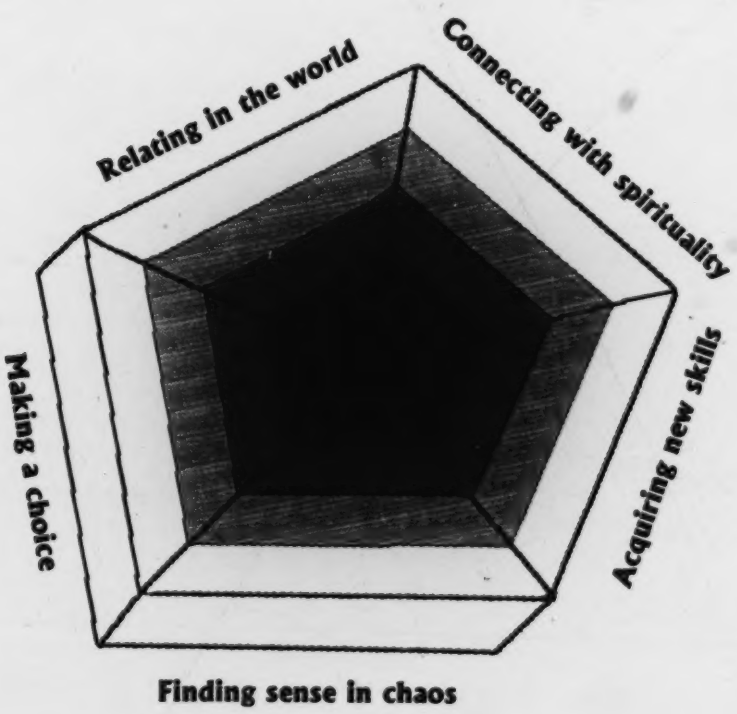

Figure 1

CHAPTER 6

INTEGRATION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study is to describe the experience of hope in the lives of midlife women returning to school. Five common themes emerge from the data to describe hope as experienced in reentry midlife women. These dynamics of hope centre around relating in the world, connecting with a benevolent spirituality, acquiring new skills, finding sense in the emotional chaos of life, and making a choice. On a different level, these themes describe hope, respectively, as affiliative, transcendent, cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Each of the dynamics found in this research is viewed as a process in itself, with ebb and flow, and each has a part to play in the entire process of hoping. The "Model of Hope" revealed from this inquiry as presented indicates these dimensions as separate and distinct, while in reality, each is interrelated and interactive, depending upon the uniqueness of the individual.

The following discussion is preceded by an introduction. As each dynamic is discussed, the reader will discover frequent overlaps as each part of the hoping process becomes integrated. This is consistent with the complex nature of hope (Dufault & Martocchio, 1985; Ersk, 1992; Hinds & Martin, 1988). Implications for research conclude the discussion of each dynamic.

DISCUSSION

The dynamics of hope

Introduction: Numerous models and perspectives exist regarding hope. In this study, the researcher arrived at five common themes which she felt most appropriately described the process of hoping for women in her study. The final step of data analysis occurred when the investigator purused the literature and then gave more psychological language to these themes. Once labelled, a strong parallel was recognized with the work of Dufault and Martocchio (1985). A significant difference in the labelling exists for the present study in the researcher referring to dynamics rather than dimensions. Since reference to dynamics is indicative of movement and a form of energy, and reference to dimensions holds more of a stationary connotation, it is suggested that dynamics are how dimensions are manifest.

Dufault and Martocchio (1985) studied 35 cancer patients and later had their findings confirmed in a longitudinal study with terminally ill persons. They conceived of hope as made up of two spheres having six common dimensions. It is in their six dimensions of hope that this present study shows consistency. The six aspects of hope they found are listed as: affiliative, cognitive, affective, behavioral, temporal, and contextual. In this study of hope in midlife reentry women, the following five dynamics of hope are revealed: affiliative,

transcendent, cognitive, affective, and behavioral. While this present research includes a transcendent dynamic in the research findings, it does not specifically encompass the temporal and contextual dimensions of Dufault and Martocchio.

In consideration of the differences in these two studies, Dufault and Mortocchio (1985) speak of the temporal dimension of their research as involving the experience of past, present and future time as it relates to hope. In this inquiry, the factor of time is acknowledged, but not considered as a distinct dynamic. A lot of the future orientation of hope in the lives of the participants is reflected in their present acquisition of skills within the cognitive dynamic of the hoping process. The behavioral action they direct toward realizing this future hope is demonstrated in their present return to school and their anticipations of a new career, personal satisfaction, and greater economic freedom. The affective influence of the past on each of the woman's experience of hope can be apprecitated as women in this project work through emotional issues related to understanding their past. As well, the sense of confidence and mastery experienced by these participants as they consider past and present successes helps enable hope for their future actions.

Dufault and Martocchio (1985) talk about the contextual dimension revealed in their understanding of hope. They explain this as involving the life situation surrounding and influencing the individual's sense of hope. As related to this study, midlife makes up the contextual dimension of the hoping process. In some respects, it comes as no suprise this present project would reveal findings

similar to that of Dufault and Martocchio, since midlife, whether considered a time of crises or a transition with widely recognized changeableness, encompasses a time of signficant challenge. From this viewpoint, it follows that a study of hope in midlife individuals would most likely show consistency with research findings involving other persons in strategically challenging states, as for example, those who are encountering illness. From this perspective, it is logically deduced that outcomes of this present inquiry of midlife reentry women show consistency with the findings of Dufault and Martocchio (1985) in all of their six dimensions of hope.

Affiliative dynamic: This part of the hoping process is revealed in the research as focussing around relating in the world. It is the dynamic of hope I refer to as affiliative since it pertains to relationships with others and with things of nature. Dufault and Martocchio (1985), in their discussions on the affiliative dimension of hope, cover a broader spectrum, talking about this as including relationships with persons, other living things, and God. In this study, relationship with God is discussed as a separate dynamic.

The value of relationship with others is widely recognized as a viable force with power to either give or take away from experiences of hope. In discussing affiliative relationships at the Workshop, for instance, older women appear to hold special meaning for most participants involved in this study. Responses to the question asking participants to reflect upon a person who they felt modelled

hope indicated that five women selected a woman with whom she held an extraordinary relationship, whether this person be mother, grandmother, or caring friend taking the place of mother. Each of the persons cited were influential in the lives of participants and were talked about as actively involved in living their own lives despite obstacles of cancer, death of a spouse, or angina. Some participants spoke about the 'differentness' of their hopeful person and the joyful zest each displayed toward living.

Research carried out by Higgins (1994) supports the influence relationship has on women. Her inquiry centred around the resilience of individuals negotiating significant challenges in their development who were able to consistently "snap back" to complete their own development and self-growth. Such a study and definition of resilience seems well suited to the life challenges experienced by most of the women in this study of hope. Higgins talks about "... potent surrogates who became beacons of possibility" in all but four of the forty-five adult women she studied (p. 323). In describing the characteristics of the surrogate, participants spoke of the immense effect of sustained kindness, the availability of the surrogate, and the capacity for fundamental positive regard. These qualities inspired the vision of a better life and sustained a faith within participants that they were "made for more" (p. 323). The surrogate's vision became internalized and acted upon to the extent it became a vital part of the women's self-image. Findings from this study support the feminist perspective regarding the significance of relationships for women. Kaplan (1985) puts forth

the "Self-in-Relation" model, claiming the importance of relationships for women begins in childhood and continues into the interactions of adulthood. She explains this theory as revolving around self-growth within relationships. The differentiated self gradually evolves through connection with others. This need for relationship in a woman's life is viewed as a strength required for motivation and action. The feminist viewpoint suggests impairment of relational needs leads to feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and depression (Jack, 1993; Kaplan, 1983; Kaslow & Carter, 1991; Rothblum, 1983).

Although relating in the world with people is known to enhance a sense of hope, the place of relating with nature as a virtue in energizing, renewing, and inspiring hope does not appear in research to hold the same degree of importance. Dufault & Martocchio (1985) speak briefly about being "renewed by beauties of creation" (p. 386), but this does not do justice to the experience of women in this study as they regard their relationship with nature. This research indicates the role nature plays in enabling hope through quiet times of reflection and sensing fully. Though it is a difficult phenomenon to describe, this sense of hope is associated with inner feelings of calm, serenity, and peace.

Jevne (1993) talks about hope as being derived from a number of sources (p. 124). This is consistent with representations chosen by each of the women as symbolic of what is important for her relative to hope. Most participants chose symbols having to do with the affiliative and/or transcendent dynamics of hoping. These representations included, for example, a picture of a soaring eagle, a

bouquet of flowers, a picture of grandchildren and a Bible, and a ring made from the resin of trees. Such symbols continue to speak of the hope enhancing power each woman finds for herself in personal experiences of giving and receiving in relationship, whether this be in interaction with others or with nature.

Implications for research centre around the significance of relationships shown to exist for midlife reentry women. In view of the impact of relationships found in this project to sustain a sense of hope for these women, as well as the research findings of Higgins (1994), and Kaplan's concept of Self-in-Relation, it becomes clear that one relationship with another holds the potential for another's life change. These studies place a high value on mentoring and surrogate relationships, raising questions as to how this need might be best met for reentry women. Since outcomes from this inquiry indicate participants' desire to extend beyond self and hope to contribute something of value to human kind, is it likely that midlife women might discover their connections in surrogate or mentoring relationships to be meaningful and purposeful? As well, a need exists for more in-depth study of the significantly large part nature plays in sustaining a sense of hope for women in midlife returning to school.

Transcendent dynamic: A commonality between the affiliative and transcendent dynamics of this study pertains to an aspect of relationship since most participants experience their connection with God as a personal relationship. Although research widely acknowledges the influence of religious beliefs in

sustaining a sense of hope, this study makes a distinction between formal, traditional religion, and the transcendent dynamic of spirituality experienced by each of the women in this project.

For each participant in this inquiry (despite no awareness of sampling bias) feelings of trust in a benevolent Higher Power make up the common factor involved in their connection with spirituality, and for most, this involves a faith that speaks of God as having a special plan for every life, knowing best, and ultimately in control. Most women in the study speak of their confidence in being used to carry out God's plan. They experience a sense of every situtation having value and of God's ability to use negative experiences to bring about something good.

Trusting in the connection each woman experiences with spirituality leads to a sense of hope in whatever will be. For instance, several of the women relate times when it became impossible to manage what was going on in their lives, and when they relinquished control and trusted God. Consideration of this leads to thinking about the dichotomy that then seems to exist between the transcendent and behavioral dynamics of hoping. This is interesting since connecting with spirituality oftentimes has to do with participants 'letting go,' surrendering, and accepting situations in which they feel no sense of control, while the behavioral dynamic has to do with trying to exert control. When circumstances seem unmanageable and confusing, and persons feel helpless, hope is threatened. The part of hope related to behavior and making a choice centres around effecting a

difference in what is happening in the environment, yet in some instances, for women in this study, there seems to be a time when the best choice possible is that of acceptance with hope.

Ersek (1992) talks about hoping strategies in adults undergoing bone marrow transplantation for leukemia. It was found they sustain their sense of hope by keeping the illness in its place by both maintaining and relinquishing control. This is somewhat similar to the findings of hope in this present study in that reentry women both held onto, and let go of the situation as a strategy in maintaining their hopefulness. Understanding hope in this dichotomy seems to centre around whether individuals make the choice to surrender and trust on their own accord, or whether they are coerced into accepting something for which there is no personal agreement or has been no choice. In other words, for women in this study, it seems to be a matter of deciding to exert control or relinquish control, and you do this by figuring out how much you can do and then trust God with what you cannot do.

In considering the direction of further research, possible questions arise as to the relationship between hope and spirituality and a response to the question, "What is the experience of hope in spirituality?" requires exploration.

Cognitive dynamic: In this study, the cognitive part of the hoping process has largely to do with learning, the acquisition of new skills and the rational thinking congruent with the pursuit of reentry goals. Most relevant to this project

are the findings of hope each woman attaches to her reentry experience. For most participants in this research, their hopeful experience seems a two-edged sword. On the one hand, there exists anticipation of new learnings, dreams of different careers, optimism about economic independence, and desires for renewed meanings, feelings of self-worth, and sense of purpose. Reentry is talked about as relating with those who love the same ideas, connecting with colleagues at a soul level, feeling the same fascination with new insights, and experiencing the elation from a project well-done. As well, new worlds of thought are opened up and abilities to think critically are gained.

On the other hand, hope for these women returning to school is threatened with the emotional turmoil of future uncertainties and fears of failing. Several women speak about deterioration in relationships, regrets in this regard, feelings of loss, and plans to look after various parts of their hope once they have slowed down or finished their academic commitments. For participants, the demands of school require a great deal of flexibility in all dimensions of their hoping experience. Their academic obligations impinge on time formerly valued for other things and subsequently bring varying degrees of dissonance into the lives of each woman. In struggling to maintain her personal sense of equilibrium, the significance every woman in this study attaches to her reentry goal outweighs the imbalances she experiences in the other parts of her hoping experience. In other words, reentry women strive to balance all that is important for them in their lives, but find this difficult to do.

In understanding this ambivalent part of the hoping experience for women in this study, Mezirow (1991) talks about perspective transformation taking place as individuals encounter dilemmas in life and learning. His research indicates that reentry women experience a significant challenge to their worldviews in which their previously valued beliefs and meanings are confronted and questioned. He states "any major challenge to an established perspective can result in a transformation" and that this can occur, for example, in response to children leaving home, illness, failing an important examination or from an eye-opening discussion or an enlightening book (p. 168). He goes on to discuss these challenges as painful, threatening, and causing reevaluation of one's belief system.

In considering the dissonance taking place for some women as they return to school, Synder (1994) offers an explanation of how it is a hope such as found in reentry, holds such strength and power. He talks about hope as being "the sum of the mental willpower and waypower that you have for your goals" (p. 5). Waypower, he contends, is reflective of the ways individuals plan to reach their goal, with flexibility required to generate alternative solutions should obstacles stand in the way of attaining that goal. This understanding, applied in combination with mental willpower, appears particularly congruent with the descriptions given by participants as they speak about what is involved for them in following through on their hopes of acquiring new skills. Participants use such terms as persistence, determination, will power, tenacity, "digging in," and

"swimming upstream" as they talk about accomplishing their goals. As participants reflect upon their need for flexibility and the subsequent parts of themselves they have let go in order to make time today for learning, there are, in varying degrees, regrets for each of the women and what they have chosen to give up.

Implications for research suggest a follow up study of midlife women who have completed their program, asking whether the hopes they held for themselves as they acquired new skills met their expectations of self-satisfaction, meaning, and economic independence.

Affective dynamic: The affective part of hope in this research speaks of finding sense in the emotional chaos of life. For every participant, this dynamic talks of recognizing hope as always being there, encountering fear as a threat to the hoping process, coming to terms with the past and moving on, and taking care of one's own needs in sustaining a sense of hope. This affective part encompasses the feeling aspects of hoping, clearly forming a significant part of interaction with the remaining dynamics of the hoping process. In the affiliative part of this project, for instance, relating with nature is consistent with the need for specific periods of reflection. These reflective times are described in varying affective terms as involving feelings of quiet, solace, peace, calm, sanctity, and serenity. Similar emotions are experienced in the transcendent dimension of the study, with feelings of acceptance and surrender occasionally being talked about in relation to

maintaining a sense of hope in situations where you sometimes feel helpless. On the cognitive level of the inquiry, where rational planning and goal setting predominate as midlife women return to school, mixed emotions related to anticipation and fear have been shown to exist.

Hope for moving on and past the devastating emotional issues of prior years becomes apparent for participants in the study as they speak about overcoming their fears. Each of the women speak retrospectively of recognizing hope as somehow discovered in the midst of her hopelessness. This finding is consistent with the concept of hope as presented by McGee (1984). She describes hope as one element in the affective response to crises (p. 34) and presents a model of hope which incorporates hopefulness and hopelessness as opposites. She then contends that hope is always present and moving between these two dimensions.

Outcomes from this inquiry show that successful strategies for enhancing a sense of hope centre around an awareness of what is going on with oneself. Previous coping methods are recognized by the women in the project as an unhealthy numbing of feelings intentionally brought about by keeping busy, while present, more effective coping strategies, attempt to confront doubts, fears, angers, and despairs. Hoping effectively therefore means looking after yourself and paying attention to what is important for you. According to the findings of this study, those elements requiring attention to enable a sense of hope are uniquely embedded in the affiliative, transcendent, cognitive, affective and

behavioral dimensions of life. Maintaining a sense of hope for the midlife reentry women in this project subsequently means making time for relationships, sustaining their spiritual interests, fulfilling the demands of new learnings and making choices about how best to balance these dynamics in ways that enhance their sense of hope.

Implications for further study suggest a need to focus on how midlife reentry women can be helped to recognize hope in their lives and how they might become aware of the role of hope in inhibiting the force of fear on their sense of hopefulness.

Behavioral dynamic: This research reveals a behavioral dynamic as part of the hoping process for midlife reentry women. This has to do with making choices related to adopting a hopeful, realistic attitude, choosing to act, and taking a risk. It also involves using voice since women in this study found that choices were made and changes happened as they expressed themselves. The necessity of the behavioral dynamic to overlap actively with the relational, spiritual, cognitive and affective areas of the hoping process in this study becomes evident. Should none of these dynamics be acted upon, hope would then become a mere wish, unfulfilled dream or optimistic thought.

For most participants, a recurring theme throughout this project involves a choice to live. At one time or another, feelings of hopelessness threatened to overcome hope as almost every woman found herself face-to-face with death.

This took the form of suicidal thoughts in some, and for others, it was experienced in conflicting marital situations. For these women, gaining a sense of control over despair and building a sense of hope involved making rationally cognitive and behaviorally assertive choices. Becoming aware of possibilities for change and choosing to act accordingly helped to shift what was happening and utlimately led to feelings of less fear and a greater sense of control. For each of the participants, a willingness to risk appears positively correlated with previous tasks mastered. Success in past achievements seems to give courage for taking risks and making new choices. Hope for the future then becomes built upon past experiences of choosing behaviors that enhance hope.

The findings of this study as related to the significance of making choices are supported by the work of Glasser (1965, 1976). As the founder of "Reality Therapy," he contends that behavior is generated from inside a person and it is each one's responsibility to choose behaviors that fulfill their personal needs. Focus is primarily on present change, since a responsible, rational shift in behavior brings about other positive changes that help create a meaningful and successful sense of self. Glasser's perspective appears congruent with this study of hope in the lives of midlife reentry women since findings in this project indicate that maintaining a sense of hopefulness and well-being is related to successful choice making and subsequent behavior. The interactive nature of each of the five dynamics in the hoping process indicates that sustaining a sense of

hope for midlife reentry women involves making choices and acting upon them in each of the relational, spiritual, learning, and emotional areas of their lives.

This discussion of the behavioral dynamic on influencing hope leads to several implications for research: What hope enhancing strategies help persons to choose differently? How might persons be enabled to make more positive choices for themselves? What factors are influential in enabling persons to make healthy, positive choices for themselves? How is it that some midlife reentry women come to hold a hopeful attitude about their lives?

Summary

In this study of women returning to school in midlife, hope is found to be made up of five dynamics: affiliative, transcendent, cognitive, affective, and behavioral. This research revealed that sustaining a sense of hope in the lives of midlife reentry women involves relating in the world with others and with things of nature. It also encompasses charitable connections with spirituality and the acquisition of skills that comes with learning something new. Finding sense in the emotional chaos of life suggests a working through of past issues in ways which build hope for the future. Making choices pertains mostly to the action part of hope. This study reveals each of the dynamics as interacting and overlapping with the others in a complex process of hoping. The inquiry could perhaps be considered as putting forth a concept of hope, and moving in the direction of theory from which hypothesis could be developed. Morse (1995) talks about

concepts as abstract "cognitive representations" of perceptible reality formed by direct or indirect experience. She states that "concepts are verified by determining their components, and these components variously are referred to in the literature as constituent elements, attributes, characteristics, properties, essential or defining features, and criteria" (p. 33).

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has been conducted in order to bring understanding to hope as it has been experienced in the lives of women who are returning to school in midlife. This research draws attention to the five dynamics found to be involved in sustaining a sense of hope for midlife reentry women. These dynamics are comprised of affiliative, transcendent, cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions and centre around relating in the world, connecting with spirituality, acquiring new skills, finding emotional sense in the chaos of life, and making a choice. Theses findings contain implications for education, counselling, and adult development theory and provide the basis for further study of the topic.

In considering this project, various other implications for further research arise when I contemplate different populations and what dynamics might comprise their experience of hope. Several such groups which could be involved in a study similar to this might include: 1) all ages of reentry students; 2) reentry men; 3) midlife reentry men; 4) non-reentry women in midlife; 5) non-reentry men in midlife; 6) reentry students from educational institutions such as Colleges or

trade schools. Findings from these research studies would yield more information about the hoping process from both within and without the reentry population. Other inquiries might determine whether findings could be generalized to other educational institutions and cultures. In addition, it would supplement understandings of the experience of hope in healthy functioning individuals in various life situations, and could allow for application of findings to be made within the counselling process.

Another factor implied for further research in this study revolves around a question as to whether the five dynamics of hope as revealed in this study could be developmental and attributed to changes occurring in individuals during their midlife years. Levinson (1996), for example, talks about periods of transition in which individuals look back on their lives, evaluating what the future holds, and sometimes dramatically changing the course of their lives. In his recent study with thirteen midlife women, he found the major theme of his research centred around relationships to self, family, and work. Erikson (1959, 1964) viewed midlife in a developmental context and as one of the "Eight Stages of Man." A conflict developed, he believed, between a sense of generativity and a sense of stagnation. He indicated the successful resolution of this psychosocial task resulted in the middle years as being a time of life characterized by personal satisfaction and happiness. Corlett and Millner (1993) listened to people's stories of their midlife journeys and used Jungian theory and typology in their research. Their findings suggested that middle age is represented by a number of personal

challenges and involves a transition like no other. The authors claimed midlife had at its core a search for one's authenticity and unique mission in life as well as a concern for culture and society. Dumbeck's (1994) findings indicated that midlife involves a crisis of profound and intense magnitude which can be best understood within the whole context of one's life. Both Corlett and Millner, and Dumbeck found shifts in perspective often evoked a new assessment of values which in turn frequently lead to considerations of spirituality. In summary, a need for further research is required in determing whether a correlation exists between midlife and the findings in this research study exploring hope in midlife reentry women. Also, the question arises as to whether there exists a developmental component to the nature of hope. Several general similarities pertaining to the affiliative, transcendent, cognitive, affective, and behavioral dynamics are noted when relating these other studies with the present project. More specifically, however, is the question as to whether further studies would show findings consistent with relating in the world, connecting with spirituality, acquiring new skills, feeling emotional stability, and making choices. This remains a matter for further research.

Women in this study talked of using their voices as a factor in choosing differently, and related times when they felt their voices had been silenced. Since making the choice to use voice emerges as a strong element of the hoping process, further research needs to study whether these outcomes might be extended to other midlife reentry women and might be related to factors of socialization.

Gilligan (1982) talks about relationships being experienced differently for men and women. A large part of her study centres around the responses of women to moral dilemmas, with these being found to involve an ethic of care and responsibility in relationships. The moral obligation of women associated with care and responsibility becomes one of self-sacrifice and avoiding hurt (p. 73). This contrasts with the logic of fairness approach found in men. In a society where male values predominate, Gilligan believes women begin to doubt the normalcy of their feelings and alter their opinions in deference to others. The difficulty women experience in using their voices is thereby found in their social subordination. Women, Gilligan states, listen to the voices of others rather than their own. In considering Gilligan's postulations regarding women's silence, and the outcomes from this inquiry, it would seem relevant to suggest that women, perhaps of any age, might experience higher levels of hope should they choose to use their voices and express themselves.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

Outcomes of this study indicate that sustaining a sense of hope for midlife reentry women revolves around their need for relationship, spiritual connection, new learnings, emotional stability and choice. These dynamics are interrelated as well as interactive, and on a broader level, are talked about more generally in terms of affiliation, transcendence, cognition, emotional, and behavioral dynamics.

The findings from this study hold significant implications for the school counsellor, since the needs of midlife reentry women can be readily understood and addressed with a view to what is important for her and what parts of her life she might need to give more attention. Learning about the hope experience during the training process for counsellors would enhance the likelihood of attending to the multi-dimensional needs related to reentry. Hope therapy focuses more on the strengths and competencies of the client as contrasted to traditional therapies which concentrate largely on the exploration of pathologies or deficiencies. In exploring where hope has been in the past and where hope is now, outcomes from this study suggest that, as individuals reflect on their hopefulness, they will recognize a sense of hope as always being there for them.

Enhancing hope for a midlife reentry woman requires the counsellor to be knowledgeable about the dynamics found in this study to comprise her sense of hope. An intervention based on this theory needs to be balanced with the warmth, positive regard and empathic understanding required for establishing a positive client/counsellor relationship. The relationship between client and counsellor cannot be overstated. Higgins (1994) speaks about the value of the surrogate, while most women at the Workshop write about a mentoring relationship. The implication of this for therapy lies in the ability of the therapist to genuinely care, expressing this in being attentive, concerned, and valuing. As such, the therapist can become a model of hope for clients. Higgins found that participants thrived on their surrogate's quiet admiration and genuine investment in their welfare.

Eventually, the genuine warmth surrogates showed, allowed participants to model the regard they could not originally extend to themselves (p. 328).

Research conducted by Mezirow (1991) indicates that reentry women experience a significant challenge to their worldviews in which their previously valued beliefs and meanings are confronted and questioned as they encounter diverse life situations and acquire new learnings. Counsellors therefore need to be aware of the emotional turmoil that is going on within many of these women throughout their reentry experience. Working through these issues from the perspective of transformation would provide women with an opportunity to understand the disorientation and self-examination they are experiencing. Counselling from this viewpoint holds the potential for reframing inner turmoil as self-growth with reentry being regarded as an overall positive experience at a higher level of functioning. Mezirow implies that, for those reentry women who intend to complete their program as quickly as possible in order to fulfill vocational interests, a great deal more happens to them than they expect, and this seems to occur in the affective area of their lives. On the basis of this present research, it means that reentry women experience threats to their sense of hope as issues are triggered and deeply held personal values come under new examination. The implications for counsellors in working with reentry women return to the findings of this study and an exploration of those five parts of her life which are found in this research to sustain her sense of hope.

This study revealed the Workshop to be insightful and experiential for most participants, and for some it was life-changing. On this basis and the need for midlife reentry women to relate in the world with others, it is suggested a Workshop be organized where women can interact and express themselves as to what is happening in their lives relative to hope. Considering the dynamics of hope revealed in this study as significant in sustaining hope, such a group would, for instance, give a place for midlife reentry women to meet some of their relational needs and discuss their reentry experiences from a specific hope perspective. In this way, such an atmosphere would assist in maintaining and enhancing a sense of hope for many midlife reentry women. Mezirow (1991), in his national study of reentry women, also discovered the importance of women sharing their process as well as recognizing for themselves that others have success in negotiating similar changes (p. 168). A study carried out by Campbell (1990) also provides some strong support for the value of female interaction. She researched the impact of a Canadian Jobs Strategy Reentry program on four women and found that belonging to a group of women who shared experiences and interests became the greatest determining factor in participants believing they could take actions based on their own values, interests and needs (p. 111). Much of this had to do with finding the courage to speak in a group of women who were primarily supportive and empathic. In conclusion, it is recommended that Workshops be organized to explore the experience of hope in midlife reentry women and that they be held periodically throughout the University school year.

Their purpose would serve to sustain a sense of hope in midlife reentry women as well as further research.

PERSONAL UNDERSTANDINGS

In deliberating with my research question, it was important for me that my inquiry centre around a phenomenon which was personally meaningful and would lead me further into my journey of life experience. As well, being a student in the Counselling program, it became imperative for me that my research project be of value to my future work. In this regard, I have found it more consistent with my personal philosophies to work with people using their strengths and building on what they do well. It is with such criteria in mind that I chose to study the topic of hope in midlife reentry women.

As a midlife woman returning to school, I find this study carries personal meaning and impact in ways that are both objective and subjective. For me, it has taught me to externalize my sense of hope, giving it a tangibility I can pull out, look at, assess, and influence. Within myself, I feel the study has imparted my life with greater hope, enlightenment and richness. As a result, I sense my own ability to exert control over my sense of hope in a way I had not previously recognized. It was affirming for me as I listened to others and became aware of the parts of my life I found most significant and most hope inspiring. Sustaining my own sense of hope requires me to reflect upon my needs as they pertain to relating with others, connecting with spirituality, acquiring new skills, finding

sense in the emotional chaos of my life, and making choices. These dynamics provide a concrete and straight-forward model of hope for me. This has been a helpful insight in leading me to sort out what is important for me at this time in my life. It has led me to finish my program as soon as possible so I can put my life into balance and get back those parts of my life this study has shown are important for me.

The process of uncovering spirituality as a dynamic of hope was unexpected, and since this forms a vibrant part of my own sense of hope, I felt a connection with the women in a way I had not anticipated. As well, I did not expect each woman would attach significance to relating in the world with nature and consistent with this came the need for specific periods of reflection. Looking at fear as an important affect in inhibiting or motivating a sense of hope was personally enlightening. It added insight in an immeasurable way to my concept of hope and hopelessness and became a revealing factor for me as I recognized the impact of this on my sense of hopefulness.

I do not believe I am alone in the impact this study has had. The additional comments and care each woman took in reviewing her transcripts spoke to me of the value each felt in conveying her sense of hope to others. Several women requested copies of their transcripts. Others laminated their collages and one woman set hers up in a work area to remind her of the "bigness" of her hope. Comments such as, "now I turn to hope rather than hopelessness" attest to the personal significance women experienced through participation in this study.

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Appendix A

Life Experience Information

Re: study for, "The Experience of Hope in the Lives of Midlife Women Returning to School" Researcher: Darolyn Burden (458-4813)

Code _____ Date_____
Age _____
City/Town/Place of Residence _____
Date of Reentry _____
Program of Study _____
Year of Most Recent Full-time Study _____
Previous Education _____
Current Occupation _____
(if involved in work other than Student)
Previous Occupation prior to Reentry _____
No. of Children _____
Marital Status _____

Think of a time when hope changed something in your life and write a paragraph about this time.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Research Title:	The Experience of Hope in the Lives of Midlife Women Returning to School
Researcher:	Darolyn Gwen Burden Department of Educational Psychology Masters of Education Candidate University of Alberta
Telephone:	458-4813
Thesis Supervisor:	Dr. R. Jevne Telephone: 492-7273

I am a Masters of Educational Psychology student conducting a research study which will explore the experience of hope in the lives of midlife women returning to school. This knowledge can form the basis for further understanding in education, therapy and research.

The following aspects of the study have been explained to my satisfaction and I have had opportunity to ask questions:

1. Information for the study will be obtained in three ways: a) one video taped three to five hour workshop entitled "Exploring your Hope" b) one tape recorded individual interview approximately one hour in duration c) one tape recorded follow-up feedback interview approximately one hour in duration. The workshop and interviews will be held at Hope House, 11032-89 Ave., Edmonton, AB.

2. In the "Exploring your Hope" group workshop, I will be asked to share my experiences of hope and to participate in the following exercises: completing a 12 point Herth Hope Scale, drawing a life line and possibly making a collage. I will be asked to bring a hope enhancing object to the next stage of the research.

3. In the next stage of the project, I will participate in an interview of about one hour during which time I will continue to describe hope and talk about how the object I have chosen has been hope enhancing.

4. In the final phase of the research, a follow-up feedback interview will take place in which I will be given opportunity to discuss emerging themes and patterns. I will be asked to validate the accuracy of the findings. At this time, I will also be able to express any feelings I might hold toward my participation in the project.

5. I understand that all information given and recorded during the workshop is confidential and that the interviews will be kept under lock and key. Upon completion of the study, all video tapes and audio cassette tapes will be erased.

6. I understand that I will not be mentioned by name and that a code name will protect my identity. Only the researcher will be aware of my identity.

7. I understand that participation in the study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time.

8. I understand that participation in the project involves a minimal risk, and that if I experience distress, provision will be made for me to attend counselling at Hope House if I so choose.

Your signature below will indicate your agreement to participate in this study.

I, _____ (print name), agree to participate as a volunteer in the above research study.

Participant's Signature_____ Date _____

Witness_____

Date_____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

The Workshop

The Hope Foundation

11032-89 Avenue Edmonton Alberta Canada T6G 0Z6 403-492-1222 Fax 492-9813

CUSTOMIZED WORKSHOP

HOPING IN THE MIDDLE
February 10, 1996

Hope is grounded in the past, focused on the future and experienced in the present (R. Jevne).

Objective: To describe the experience of hope in women returning to school at mid-life

Four Guiding Questions:

1. What is hope and how do we measure it?
2. Where does my hope come from?
3. What experiences in my life have strengthened/threatened my hope?
4. How will my philosophy of hope be influenced by tnings I discover in this workshop?

Hope plays an important role in all aspects of personal and social wellness. It is capable of changing people's lives, enabling individuals to envision a future in which they are active participants (R. Jevne).

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Hope is the passion for the impossible (Kierkegaard).

EXERCISE 1

Complete these sentences.

When I think of hope, a person who comes to mind is

This is because

Without hoping, coping is flat (R. Jevne)

EXERCISE 2

Imagine that your life is a book. Name the book. Assuming you are now in the chapter entitled: RETURNING TO SCHOOL, name the other chapters, including those not lived yet. You, of course are the heroine. The author is developing the outline in point form, using single words or short phrases. Be the author and follow these instructions.

Write about what the heroine smelled during this chapter.

Write about what she ate.

Write about what she saw.

Describe sounds she heard.

Hope is a pathological belief in the occurrence of the impossible(Mencken).

Doubt is an essential element in hope (R. Jevne).

EXERCISE 3

Write about what she loved.

Write about what she dreaded.

Write about what she feared.

Write a happy sentence that ends this chapter.

Rename the chapter.

That which does not kill me makes me stronger (Nietzsche).

In the heart of each of us there is a small voice which yearns to say "Yes" to life (Ronna Jevne). How do we hear the voice of hope in ourselves, in those who look to us for assistance and in our colleagues?

EXERCISE 4

Make a collage of cut-out or drawn pictures that represent hope as you see it. Prepare to describe your collage to the group.

How do these pictures represent hope through your eyes?

Look at your pictures for a moment. Do you notice anything surprising about the pictures you have chosen?

EXERCISE 5

The next page of this book is blank. Use it to sketch the outline of a different chapter in your life.

Name the chapter.

Describe what the heroine smelled, ate, saw, heard, loved, feared and dreaded.

Write a sentence that tells what the heroine was hoping for at the end of the chapter.

Think about whether that chapter is connected to the chapter you wrote earlier today.

Rename the chapter.

Appendix D

Herth Hope Index

Listed below are a number of statements. Read each statement and place a [X] in the box that describes how much you agree with that statement right now.

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.	I have a positive outlook toward life.				
2.	I have short, intermediate, and/or long range goals.				
3.	I feel all alone.				
4.	I can see a light in a tunnel.				
5.	I have a faith that gives me comfort.				
6.	I feel scared about my future.				
7.	I can recall happy/joyful times.				
8.	I have deep inner strength.				
9.	I am able to give and receive caring/love.				
10.	I have a sense of direction.				
11.	I believe that each day has potential.				
12.	I feel my life has value and worth.				

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Appendix E

Sample of Data Analysis

Information Unit	Codes	Categories
6I: What, what specifically? Like, what, what attitude towards the world?		
6L: Um ...pause... I learned to be responsible for myself, and not responsible for everybody else.		
I: And that's how you had felt? All responsible for everybody else?	Attitude towards world had to do with concept of self	Hope as understanding
I: Or thought you should be?	Felt a lot of responsibility towards others	- letting go of responsibility for others
L: ..pause.. more .pause. just never .pause. well, let me see .pause. I'm a perfectionist. -laughs- Uh .pause. and I think just feeling like .pause. I should be perfect and I should .pause. um .pause. be able to fix everybody, .pause. and, knowing in reality that I wasn't perfect, and that I couldn't fix everybody.	Learning to let others take responsibility for themselves was difficult for me Learning to let this go Learn to take responsibility for myself Being a perfectionist hindered me Knowing impossible to be perfect Believing I should be able to fix everybody Knowing that to be impossible too	- letting go of responsibility for the whole world - letting go of perfectionism - letting go of trying to fix everybody - letting go of hurt, angers, & resentments
L: There were, I mean, that's automatic failure. -laughs- You can't win. And, and .pause. um .pause. I think that was more what come out. It was more, the taking responsibility for myself, an attitude of .pause. um .pause. that that was my job to take care of myself.	Learning my job was to care for self Accepting no one else going to care for me	Hope as self-care - taking responsibility for self first priority - no longer feeling need to take responsibility for others - giving voice to feelings & needs - letting go of old attitudes & patterns of behavior - adopting attitudes & behaviors helpful for self - reducing expectations of self and others
L: Um .pause. and, and losing the resentment that nobody else was taking care of me. -clears throat- It was kind of um .pause. freeing .pause. to, to drop all that resentment, and that anger, and that hurt that, that there wasn't anybody.	Dropping/letting go of resentments, anger and hurt As I cared for self, came to ask that others care for themselves No longer my job to take responsibility for others	
L: .pause. And I think then the flip side was that, that, that taking on the responsibility for myself allowed me to free myself from feeling like, .pause. like I put that back on everybody else, too, is that I'm taking responsibility for myself and you take your responsibility for yourself, and that's not my job -clears throat-	Learning to assume responsibility for myself involved expressing feelings & needs Giving myself permission to have voice This gave me hope for my life Gave me hope for the future Life doesn't have to be as it was Changes in me brought hope for changes in others Believing that if I can change, so can the experience of others	Hope as voice: - giving self permission to use voice - honest expression of feelings & needs gave hope for the future - using voice brought changes in self & life situations - using voice brought hope for possibility of changes in others

L: So, it was more .pause. that first step of, of being responsible for myself, and .pause. -sighs- and ..pause.. learning to .pause. express my feelings, and express my needs, and .pause. like having voice, I think, which I never allowed myself to have before that.

L: Um .pause. and all those things .pause. together .pause. gave me a new hope .pause. about my life. Um .pause. that, that now I have a way to go on and I, it doesn't have to be the same as it used to be. Um .pause. I've changed. And, and, in that, knowing that I could change, and that I could change so much, um .pause. give, gave me a lot of hope .pause. for others as well. That, that in that understanding for myself, it also gave me faith that others can change, that their experience doesn't have to stay the same.

L: Um .pause. so, for me, that's a very hopeful experience.

L: That, that .pause. we don't have to stay stuck. We don't have to just endure whatever it is that's there. That we can .pause. can make change and make a difference for ourselves, and for others.

No need to stay stuck
Life isn't about endurance
New choices can be made
A difference can occur for myself & others
Changes can happen
That's hopeful for me

Hope as action:
- making new choices led to 'unstuckness'
- acting upon new choices gave rise to hope for self & others

Appendix F

Summary of the Research Focus and Design

Research Title: The Experience of Hope in the Lives of Midlife Women Returning to School

Researcher: Darolyn Burden
ph. (403) 458-4813

As part of this research, you are being asked to participate in a study which will focus on the experience of hope in the lives of midlife women returning to school. This knowledge can form the basis for further understanding in education, therapy and research.

Information for this study will be obtained through your participation in one video taped three to five hour workshop entitled, *Exploring your Hope*, one sixty minute tape recorded individual interview and one sixty minute tape recorded follow-up feedback interview. The workshop and interviews will be held at Hope House, 11032-89 Ave., Edmonton, AB.

No preparation for the research project is required. In the *Exploring your Hope* workshop, you will be asked to share your experiences of hope and to participate in the following exercises: completing a 12 point Herth Hope Scale, drawing a life line and making a collage. You will also be requested to bring a hope enhancing object to the next stage of the project.

This next phase involves an approximate one hour interview during which time you will continue to describe hope and how the object you have brought has been hope enhancing. In the final stage of the research, a follow-up feedback interview will take place in which you will be given opportunity to discuss the

findings and to validate their accuracy. Any further feelings toward your participation in the study can be expressed at this time.

It is important for you to note that all information given and recorded during the workshop and the interviews will be kept confidential and under lock and key. Upon completion of the study, all video tapes and audio cassette tapes will be erased. You will not be mentioned by name in the study. Only the researcher will be aware of your identity.

Please know that your participation in the study is voluntary and that you are free to withdraw at any time. There is a minimal risk involved in the project in that you might feel distress as you reflect upon and describe your experiences of hope. Should this be the case, provision will be made for you to be referred to the Co-ordinator of Counselling at Hope House.

The agreed upon date for the group workshop entitled *Exploring your Hope* is **Saturday, February 10, 1996, at 10 a.m.** This workshop will be held at **Hope House, 11032 - 89 Ave., Edmonton, AB.**

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (403) 458-4813.

Appendix G

Oath of Confidentiality

Research Title: The Experience of Hope in the Lives of Midlife Women Returning to School

Researcher: Darolyn Gwen Burden

All persons associated with the above named study, which is being conducted with midlife women returning to school, are asked to sign an Oath of Confidentiality. Because this project involves confidential information, the need for strict adherence in this matter must be taken seriously. You and the researcher could be held legally responsible for any damages resulting from breach of confidentiality. Therefore, I would ask that the signing of this oath be an indication of your commitment to the personal nature of all data gathered in this project.

I, _____, solemnly affirm that I will diligently,
(print name)

faithfully, and to the best of my ability, execute according to law the duties required of me as an associate of the research project known as **The Experience of Hope in the Lives of Midlife Women Returning to School**. I will not, without due authorization, disclose or make known any matter or thing which comes to my knowledge by reasons of my involvement in the services of this project.

_____
(Signature)

Taken and subscribed before me at _____ this _____ day of _____, _____, A.D.

_____
(Witness)

Appendix H

Field Notes Summary

Code#____ Interviewer _____ Date of Interview_____

Content topics,focus, exact words, what stands out	Non-Verbal tone of voice, facial body posture, tone of interview	Researchers impressions emotional responses, discom- with certain topics, sense of the person	Analytic Process questions,hypotheses inferences, patterns interpretations